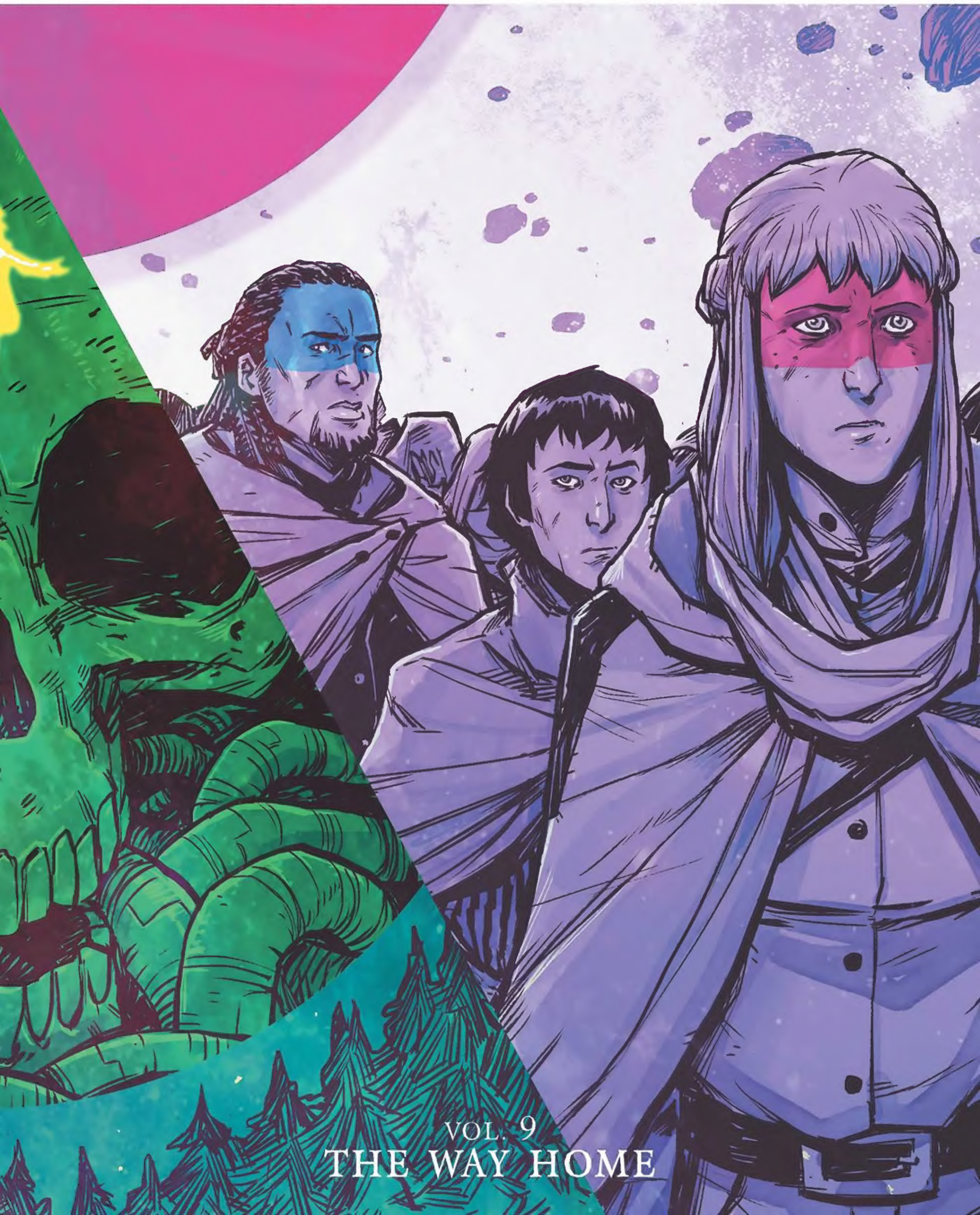


THE WOODS™

JAMES TYNION IV • MICHAEL DIALYNAS



VOL. 9
THE WAY HOME

THE WOODS™

JAMES TYNION IV • MICHAEL DIALYNAS • JOSAN GONZALEZ

VOL. 9
THE WAY HOME
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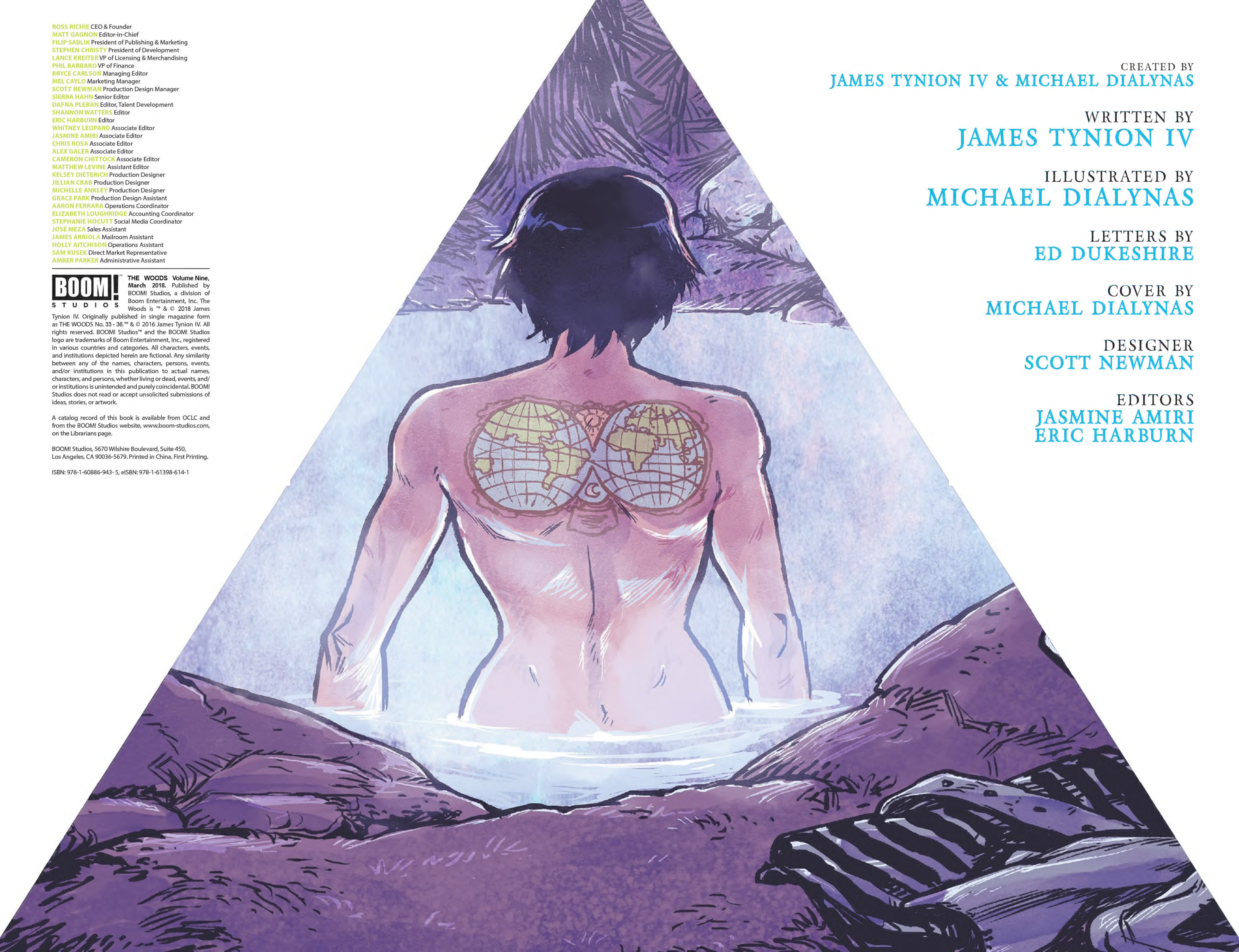
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CHAPTER

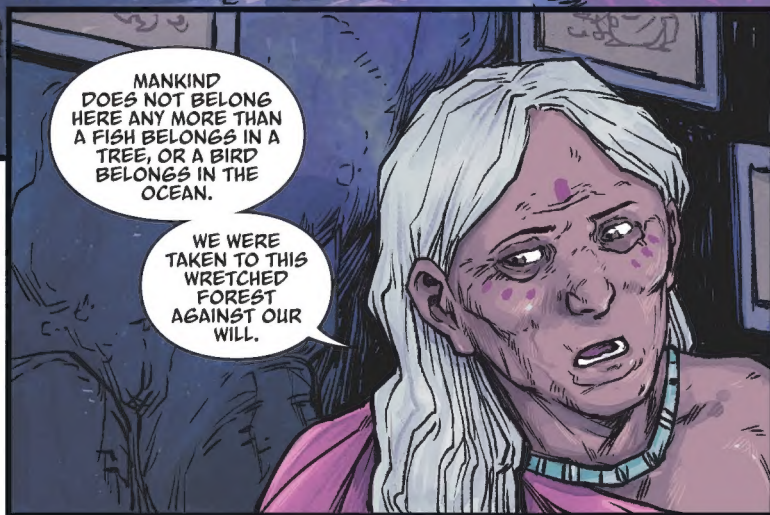
THIRTY-THREE





YOU'RE OLD
ENOUGH TO KNOW
THE TRUTH, MY LITTLE
FLOWER PETAL. OLD
ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT
YOUR BONES HAVE
BEEN TELLING YOU
SINCE YOU COULD
WALK.

THIS
WORLD IS
NOT YOUR
HOME.



MANKIND
DOES NOT BELONG
HERE ANY MORE THAN
A FISH BELONGS IN A
TREE, OR A BIRD
BELONGS IN THE
OCEAN.

WE WERE
TAKEN TO THIS
WRETCHED
FOREST
AGAINST OUR
WILL.



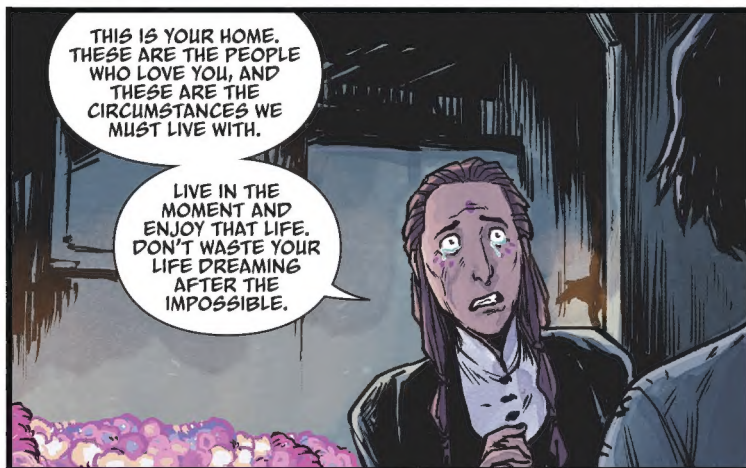
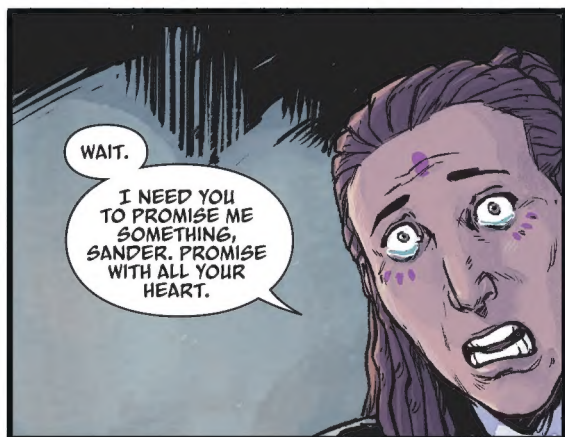
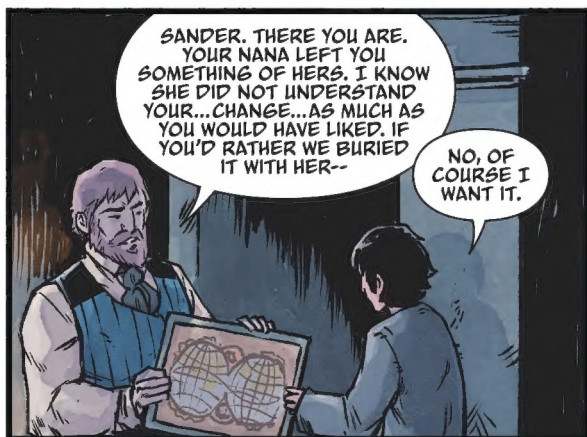
THESE
WOODS ARE
A PRISON. BUT
THIS IS YOUR
TRUE HOME.



I WANT YOU
TO PROMISE ME
YOU'LL NEVER
FORGET THAT,
CASSANDRA.



NEVER.





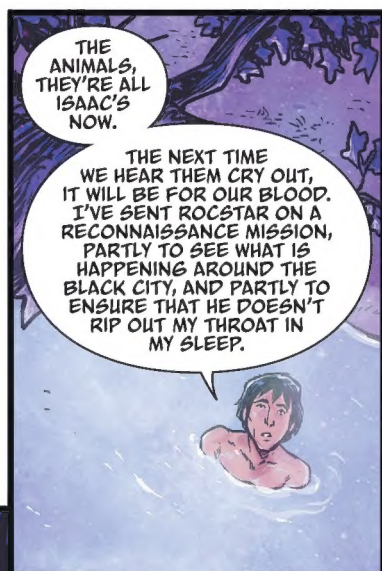




THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG, ISN'T THERE?

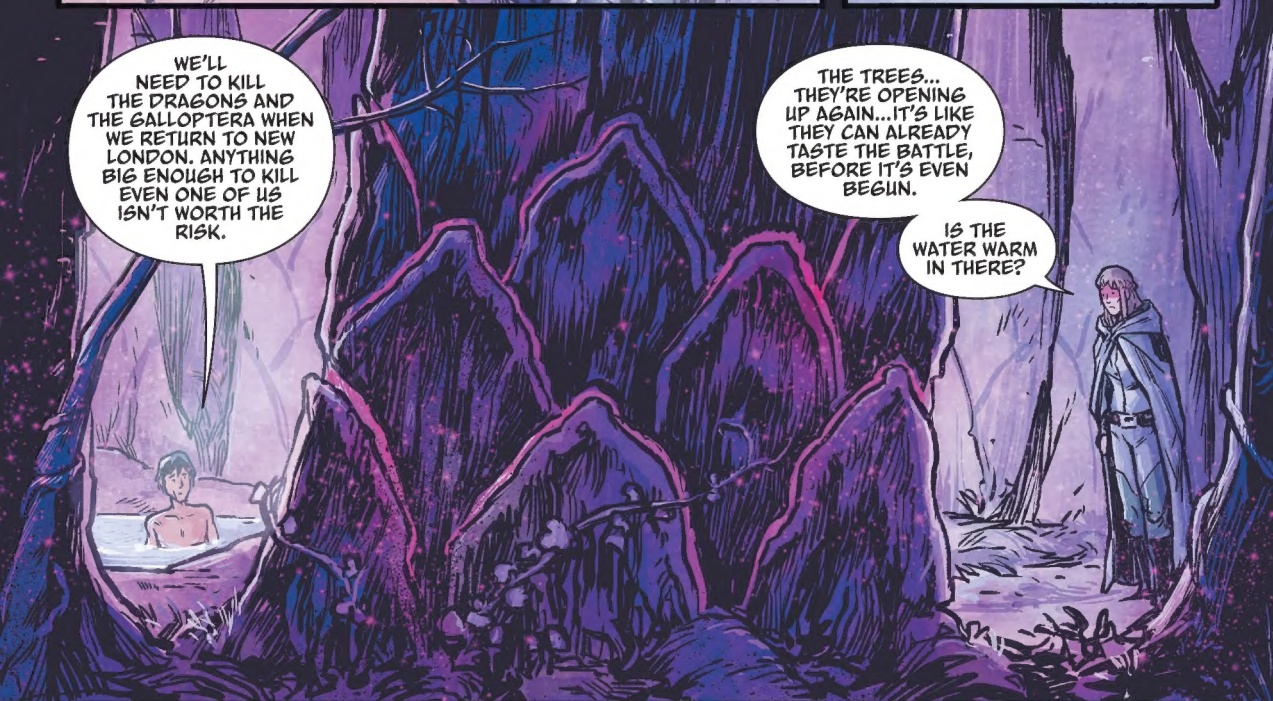
IT SHOULD.

IT'S THE SILENCE. IT'S FREAKING EVERYONE OUT.



THE ANIMALS, THEY'RE ALL ISAAC'S NOW.

THE NEXT TIME WE HEAR THEM CRY OUT, IT WILL BE FOR OUR BLOOD. I'VE SENT ROCSTAR ON A RECONNAISSANCE MISSION, PARTLY TO SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND THE BLACK CITY, AND PARTLY TO ENSURE THAT HE DOESN'T RIP OUT MY THROAT IN MY SLEEP.



WE'LL NEED TO KILL THE DRAGONS AND THE GALLOPTEA WHEN WE RETURN TO NEW LONDON. ANYTHING BIG ENOUGH TO KILL EVEN ONE OF US ISN'T WORTH THE RISK.

THE TREES... THEY'RE OPENING UP AGAIN... IT'S LIKE THEY CAN ALREADY TASTE THE BATTLE, BEFORE IT'S EVEN BEGUN.

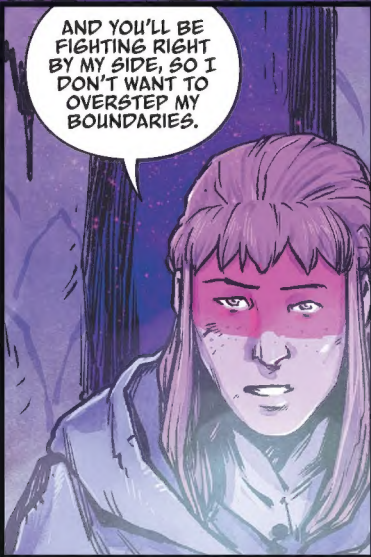
IS THE WATER WARM IN THERE?



YES, VERY.

MIND IF I JOIN YOU? NIGEL KEEPS TELLING ME THAT I SMELL LIKE A WET BADGER FOX.

YOU'RE THE GENERAL OF THE LARGEST ARMY THIS WORLD HAS EVER SEEN, KAREN. I THINK YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT.

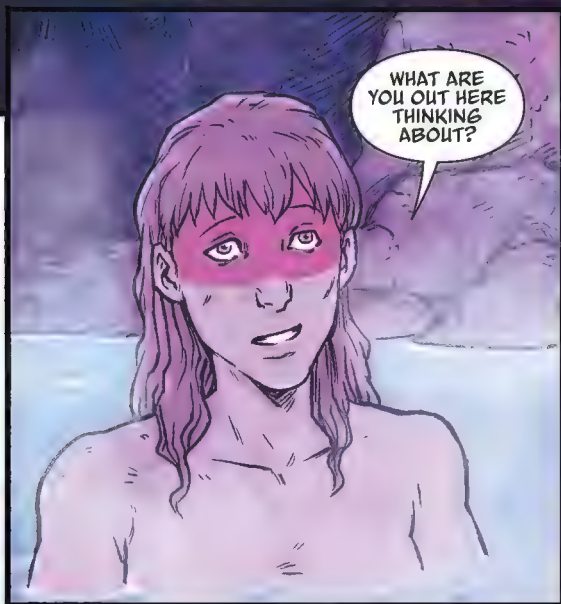
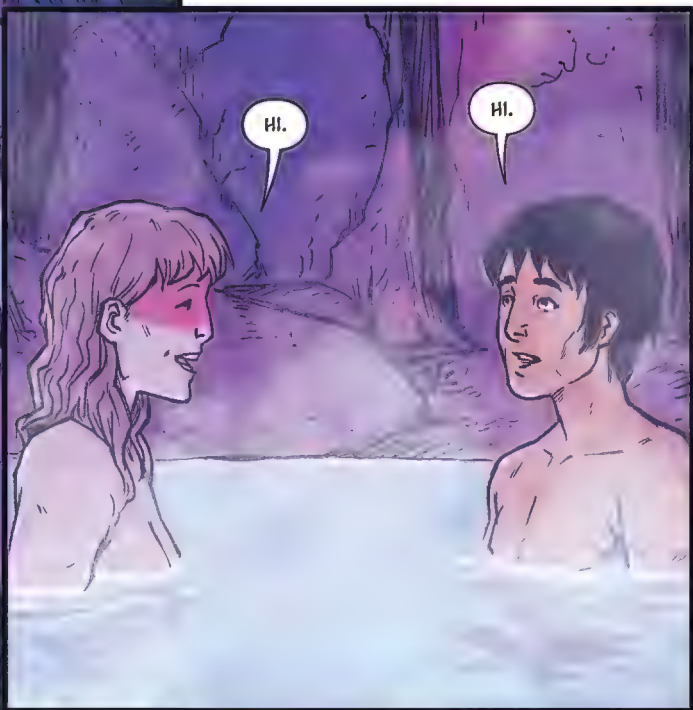
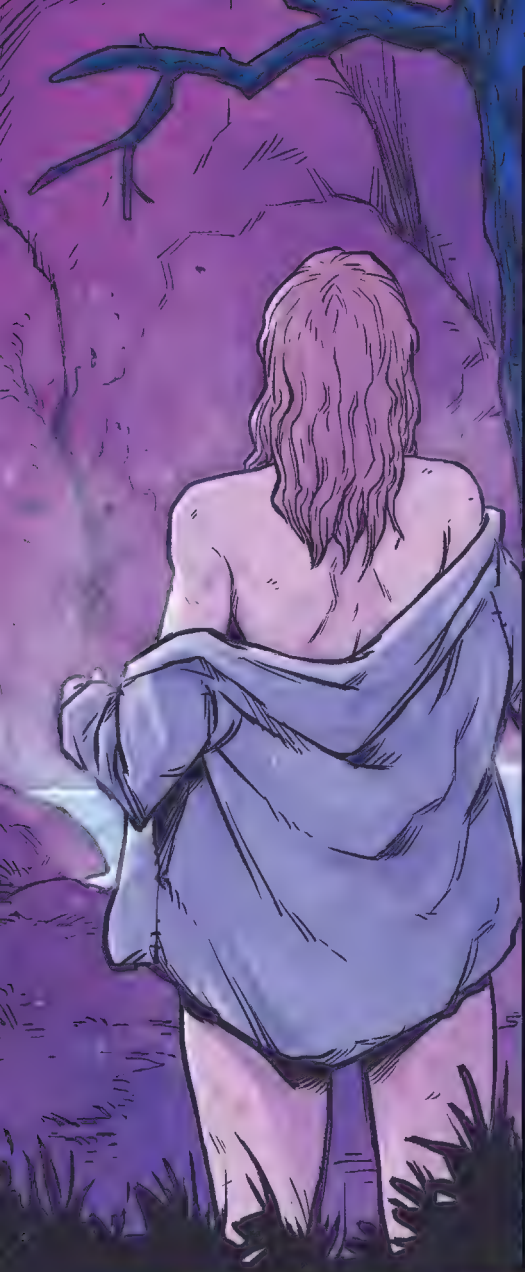


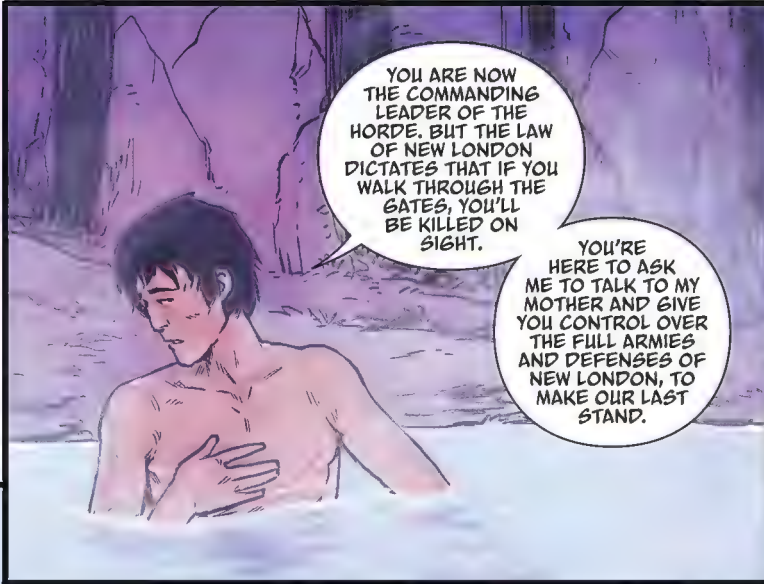
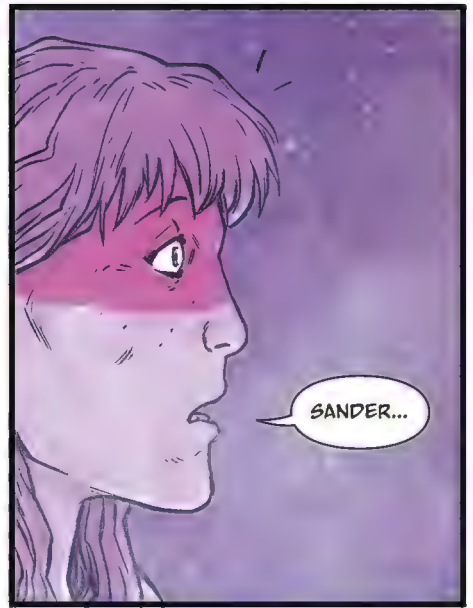
AND YOU'LL BE FIGHTING RIGHT BY MY SIDE, SO I DON'T WANT TO OVERSTEP MY BOUNDARIES.

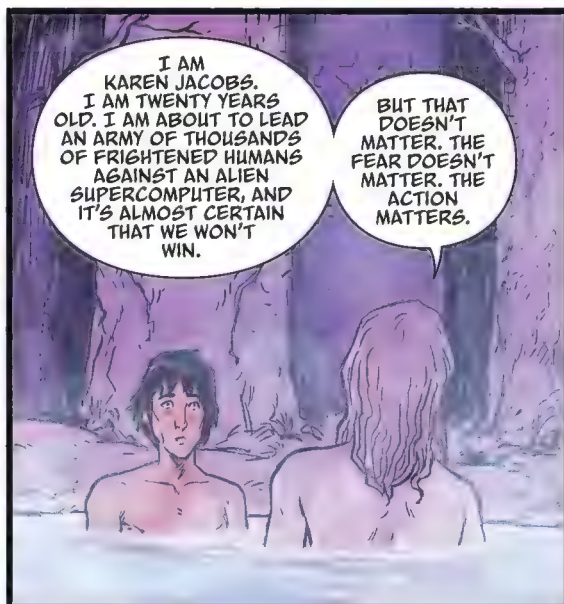
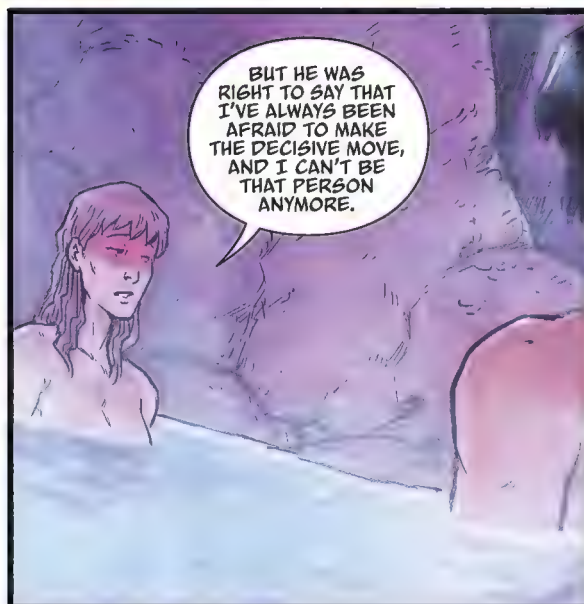
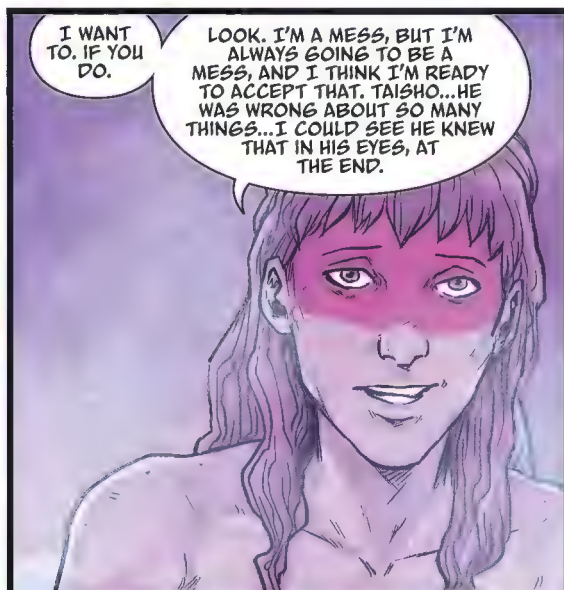
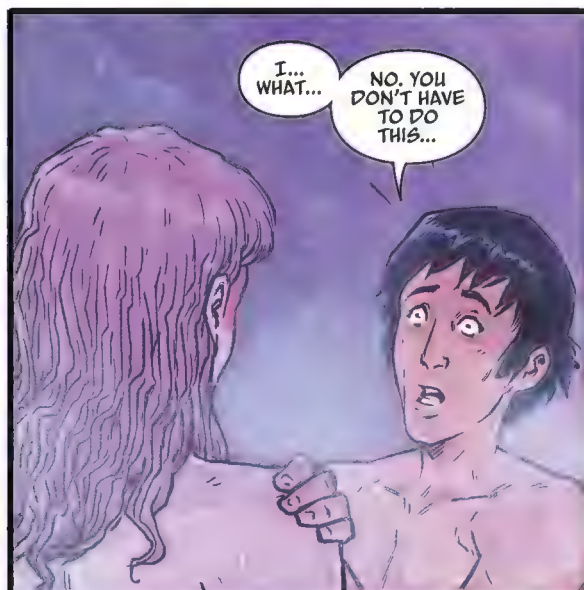
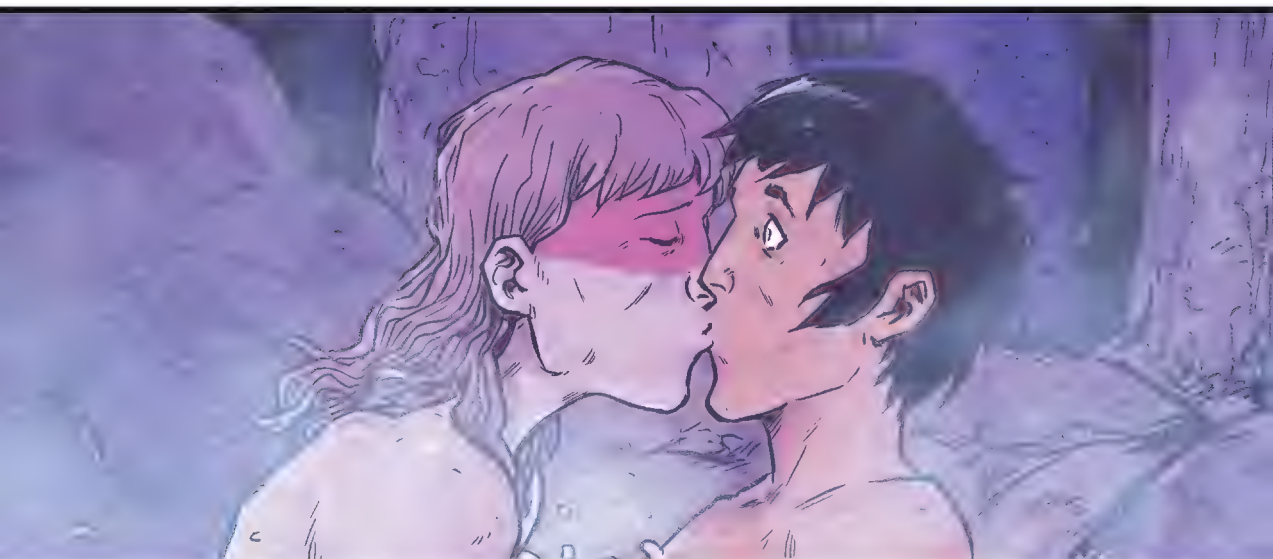


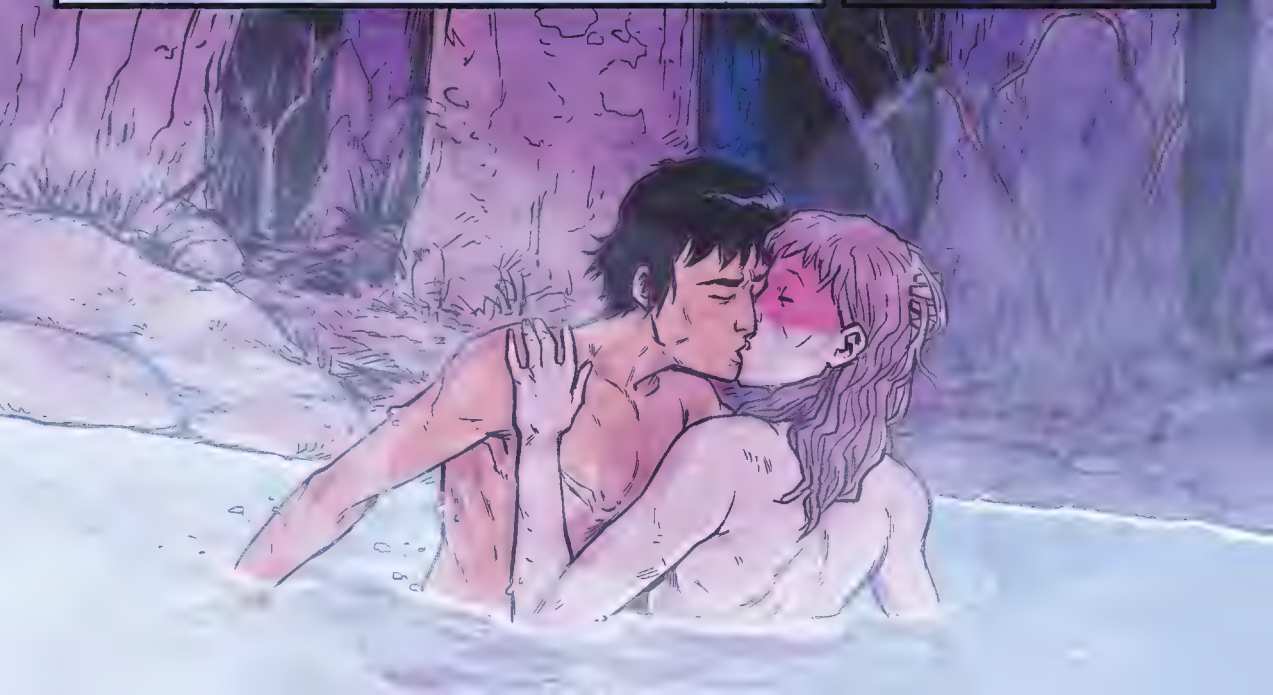
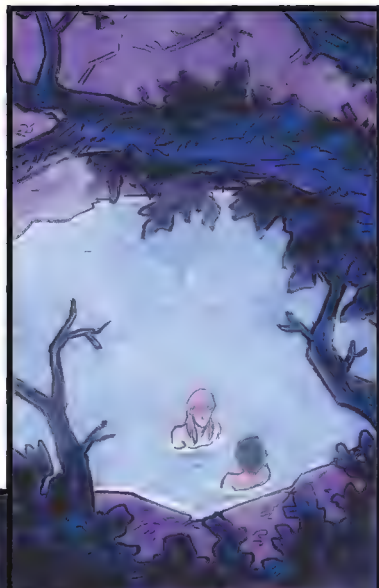
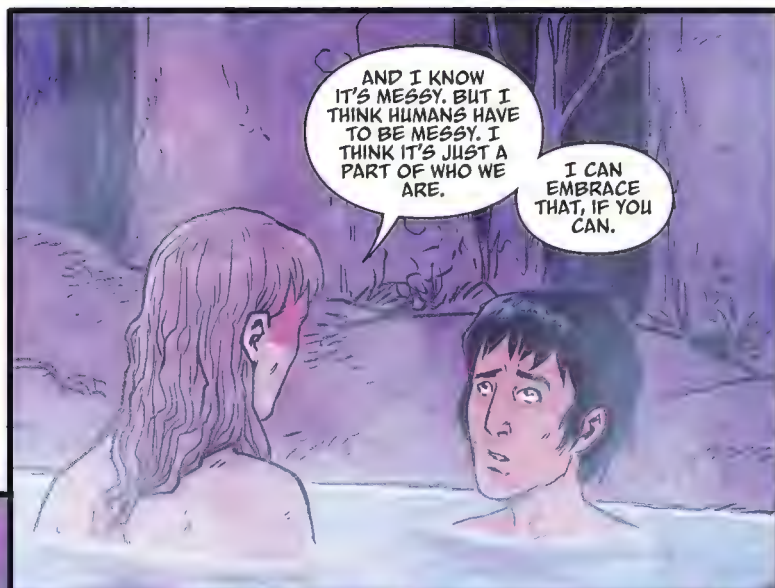
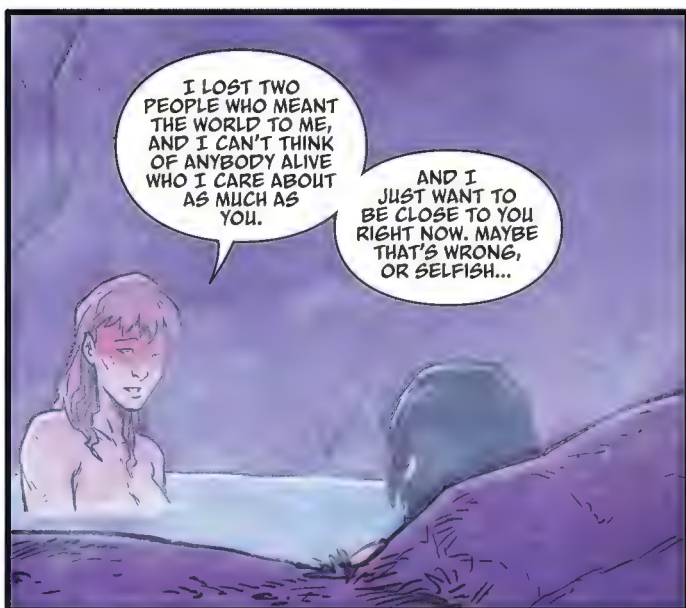
IT'S FINE.

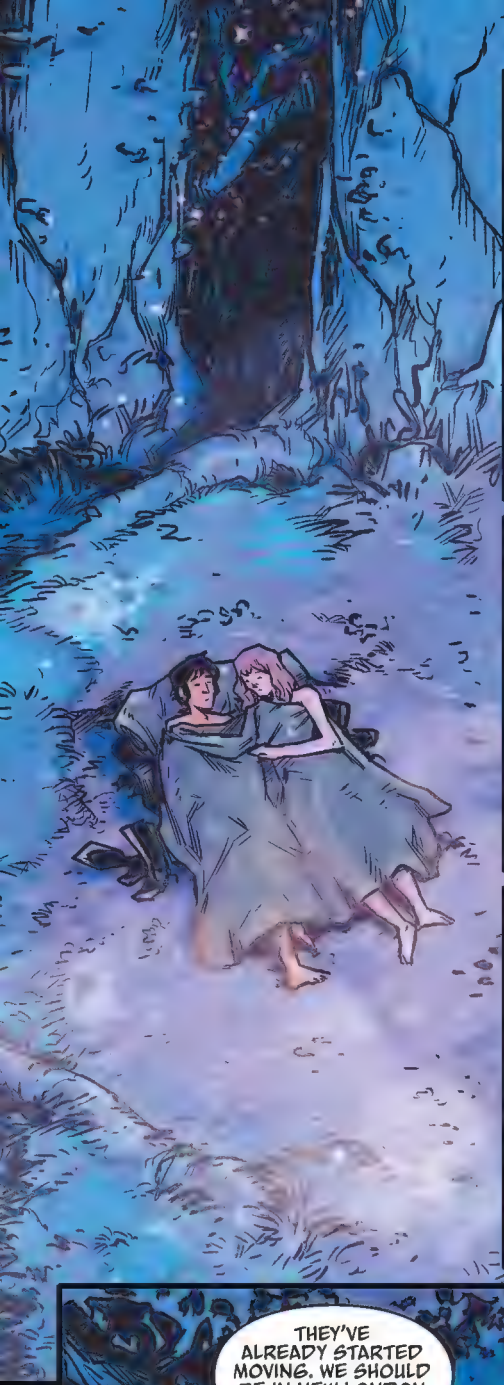
OKAY, GOOD.



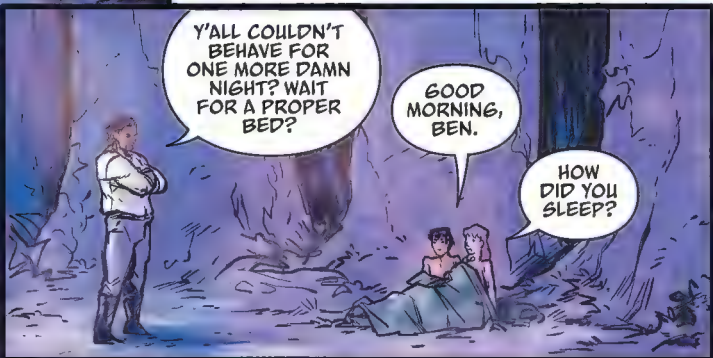








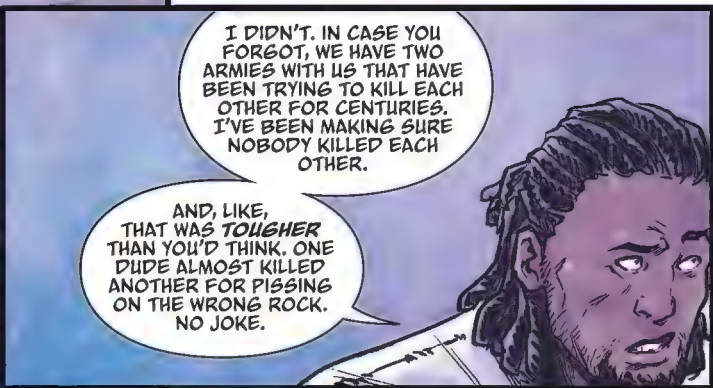
I CAN'T
HANDLE
ALL THIS
DRAMA.



Y'ALL COULDN'T
BEHAVE FOR
ONE MORE DAMN
NIGHT? WAIT
FOR A PROPER
BED?

GOOD
MORNING,
BEN.

HOW
DID YOU
SLEEP?



I DIDN'T. IN CASE YOU
FORGOT, WE HAVE TWO
ARMIES WITH US THAT HAVE
BEEN TRYING TO KILL EACH
OTHER FOR CENTURIES.
I'VE BEEN MAKING SURE
NOBODY KILLED EACH
OTHER.

AND, LIKE,
THAT WAS **TOUGHER**
THAN YOU'D THINK. ONE
DUDE ALMOST KILLED
ANOTHER FOR PISSING
ON THE WRONG ROCK.
NO JOKE.

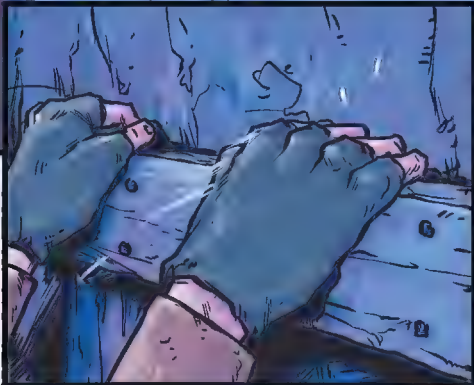


THEY'VE
ALREADY STARTED
MOVING. WE SHOULD
BE IN NEW LONDON
BY SUNDOWN.



WAIT, DO
YOU HEAR
THAT?

THAT'S...
THAT'S A
HUNTER'S
HORN.







CASEY
MACREADY.
WAKE UP.



AH!



WHERE
THE
HELL...

YOU'RE
SUPPOSED TO BE
LOCKED UP FOR THE
REST OF YOUR LIFE
FOR WHAT YOU DID
TO BAY POINT. FOR
LETTING CALDER
DIE...



OH,
THANK GOD.
I FOUND YOU.
ARE THE OTHERS
HERE YET? DID
THEY FOLLOW
ME??



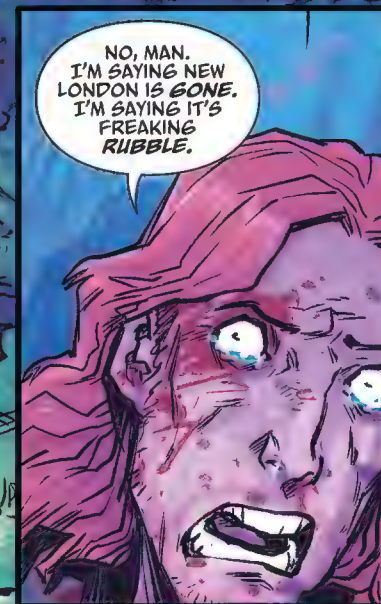
WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT, BOY? HOW
DID YOU GET OUT
OF YOUR CELL?
WHOSE BLOOD
IS THIS?!

IT...IT
HAPPENED AT
DAWN...

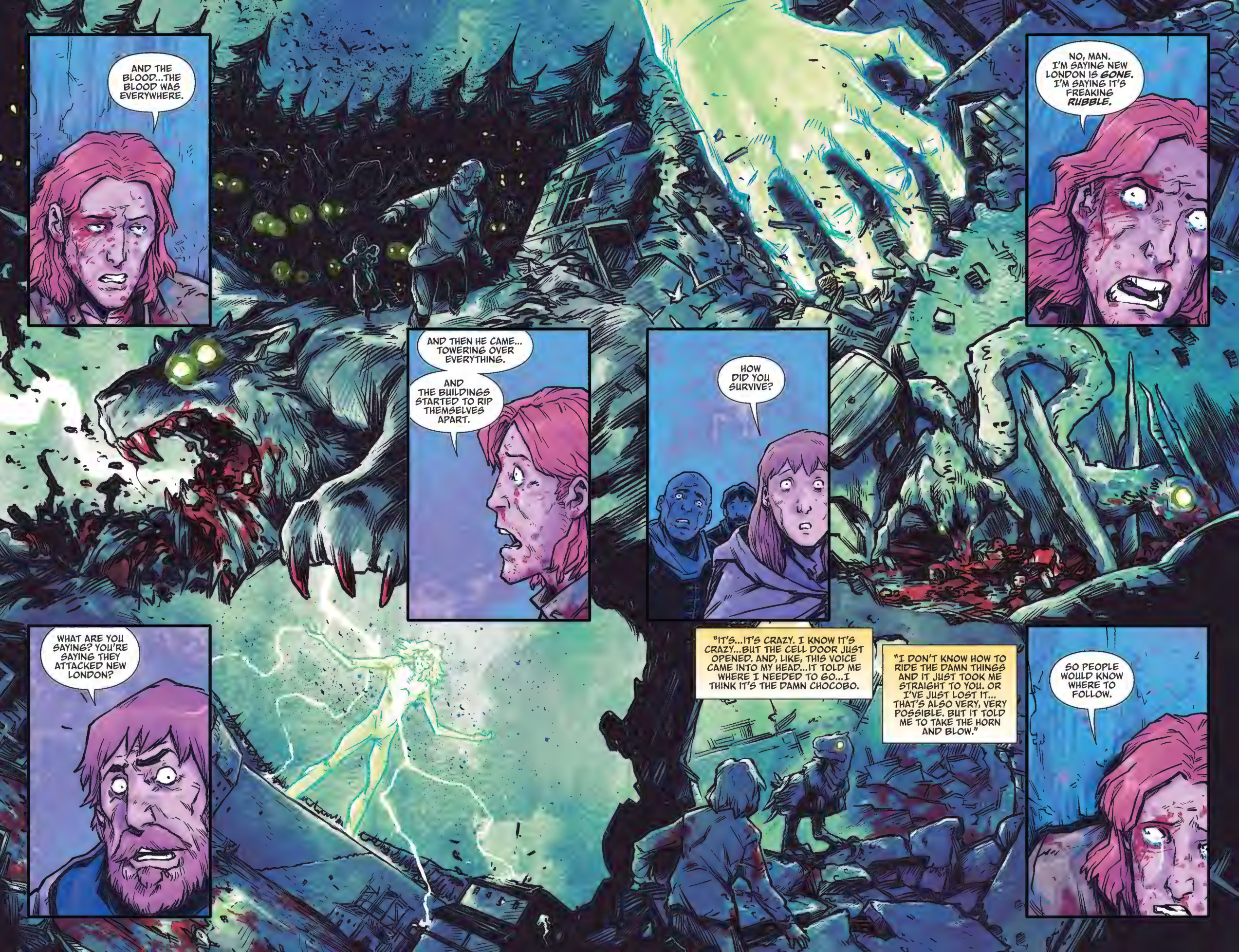
THAT'S WHEN
THE SHRIEKS
STARTED. AND THE
MONSTERS...THEY
CAME OUT OF THE
WOODS. I'VE NEVER
SEEN SO MANY, ALL
AT ONCE...



AND THE BLOOD...THE BLOOD WAS EVERYWHERE.



NO, MAN. I'M SAYING NEW LONDON IS GONE. I'M SAYING IT'S FREAKING RUBBLE.



AND THEN HE CAME... TOWERING OVER EVERYTHING.

AND THE BUILDINGS STARTED TO RIP THEMSELVES APART.



HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?



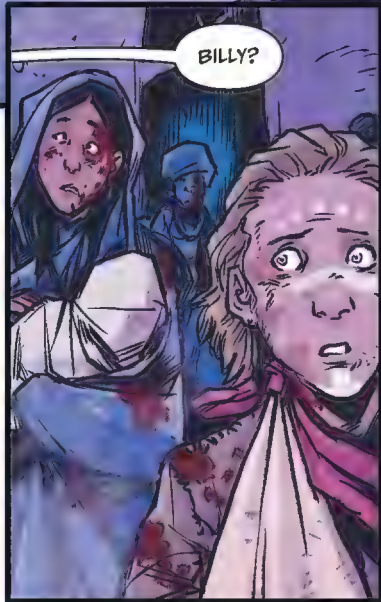
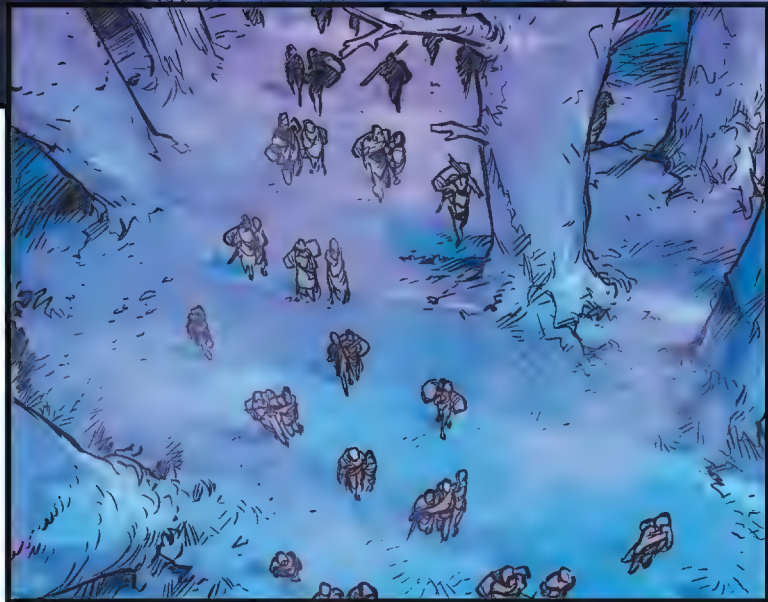
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? YOU'RE SAYING THEY ATTACKED NEW LONDON?

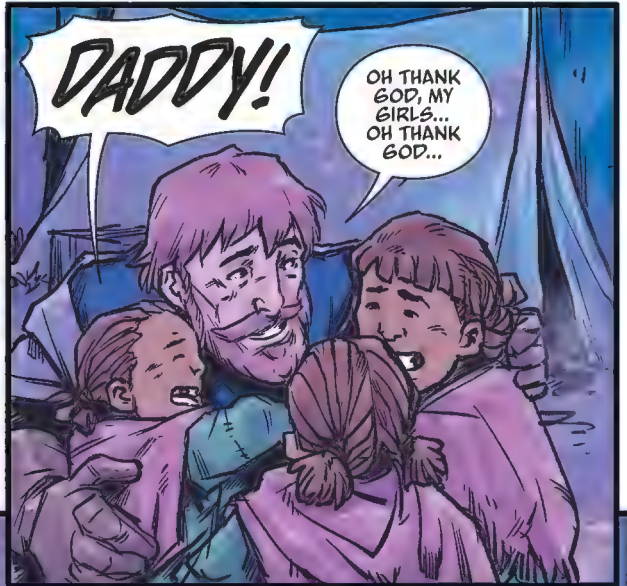
"IT'S...IT'S CRAZY. I KNOW IT'S CRAZY...BUT THE CELL DOOR JUST OPENED. AND, LIKE, THIS VOICE CAME INTO MY HEAD...IT TOLD ME WHERE I NEEDED TO GO...I THINK IT'S THE DAMN CHOCOBO."

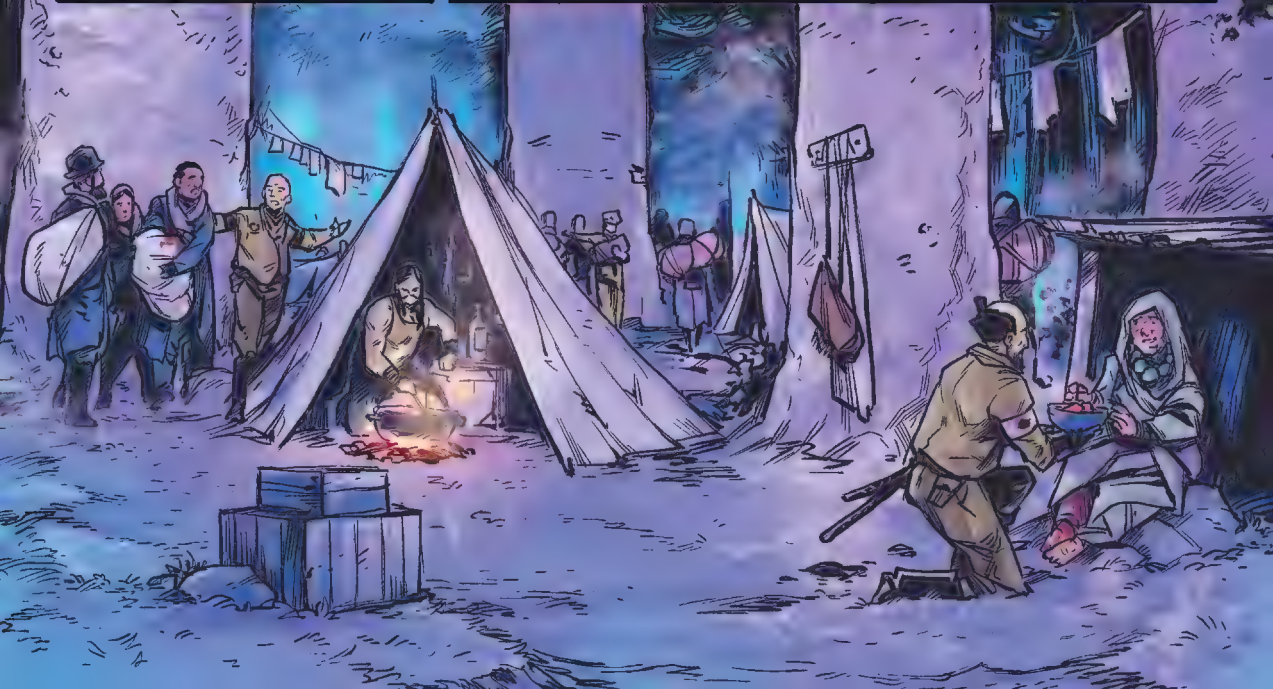
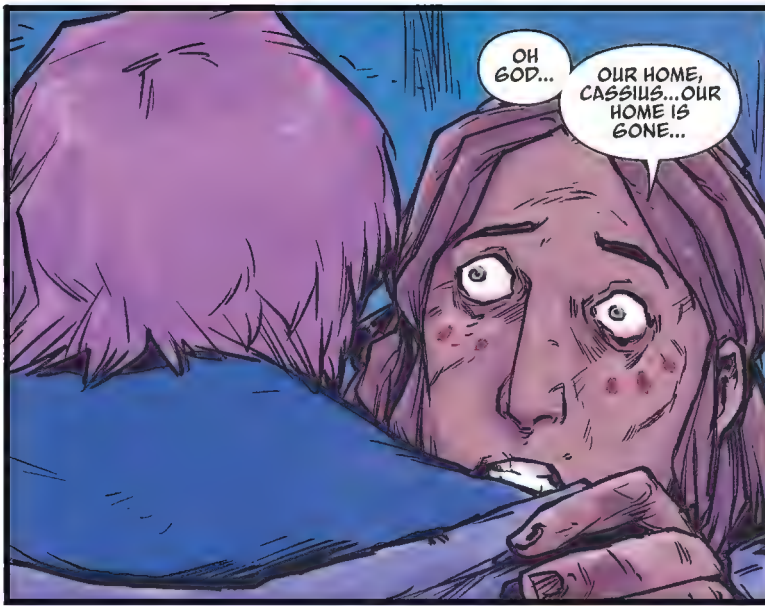
"I DON'T KNOW HOW TO RIDE THE DAMN THINGS AND IT JUST TOOK ME STRAIGHT TO YOU. OR I'VE JUST LOST IT... THAT'S ALSO VERY, VERY POSSIBLE. BUT IT TOLD ME TO TAKE THE HORN AND BLOW."

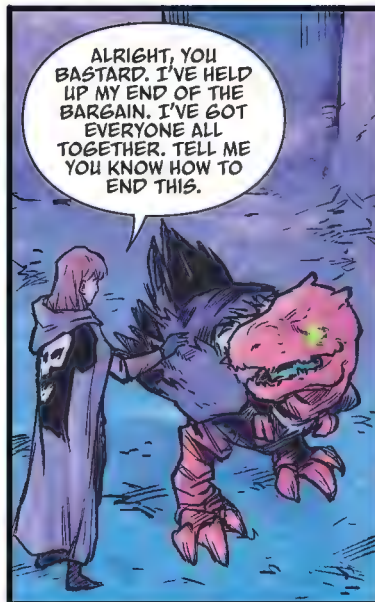
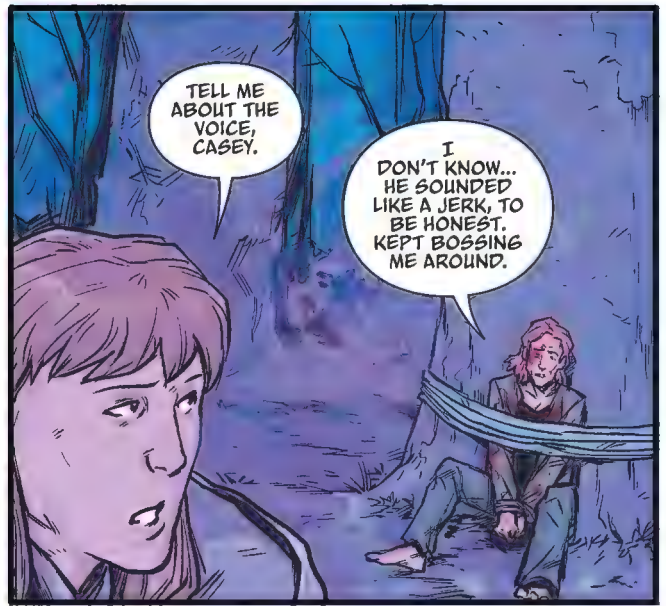
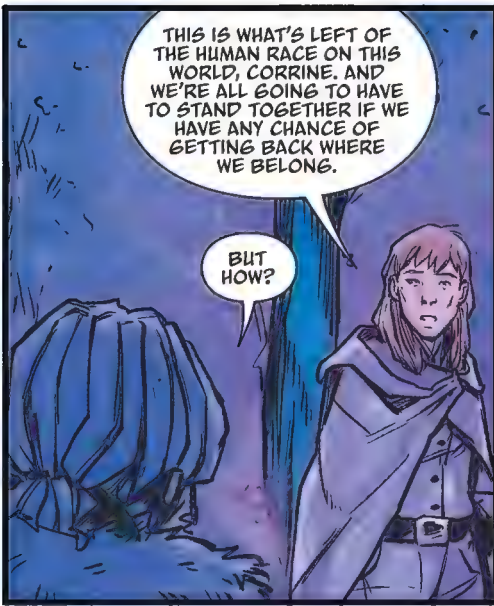


SO PEOPLE WOULD KNOW WHERE TO FOLLOW.











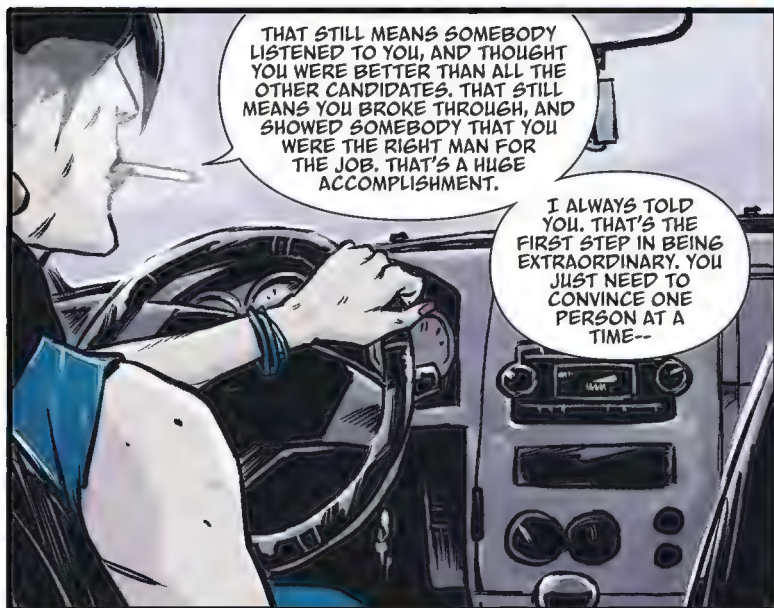
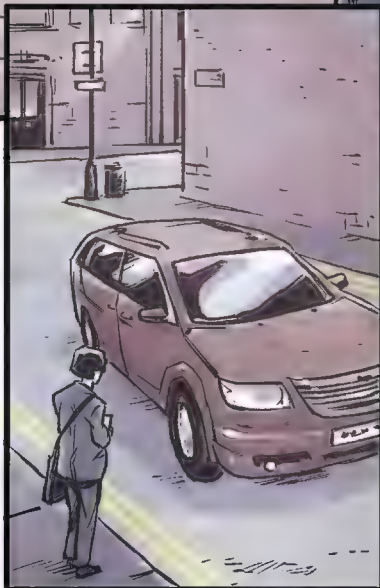
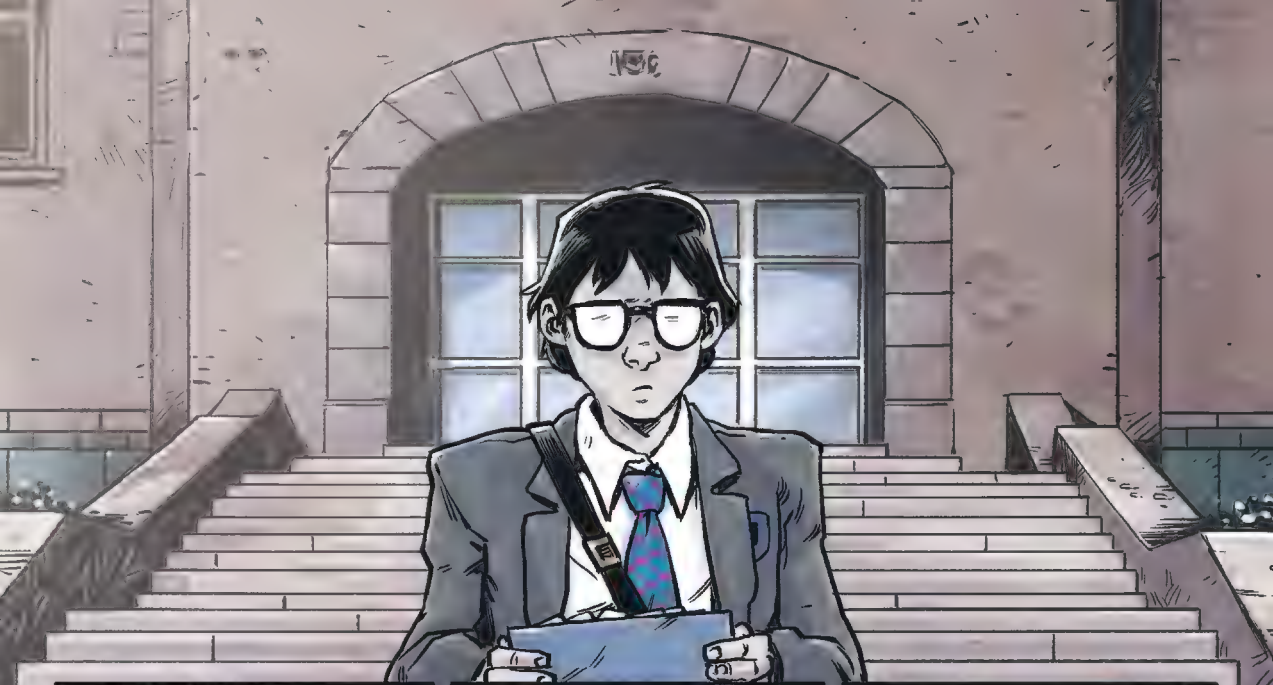
I KNOW
EXACTLY WHAT
WE HAVE TO
DO.

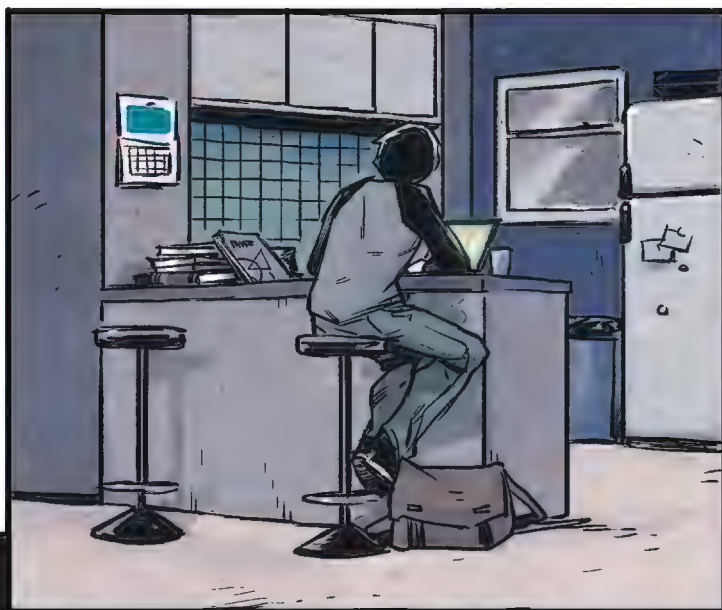
TO BE CONTINUED...

CHAPTER

THIRTY-FOUR

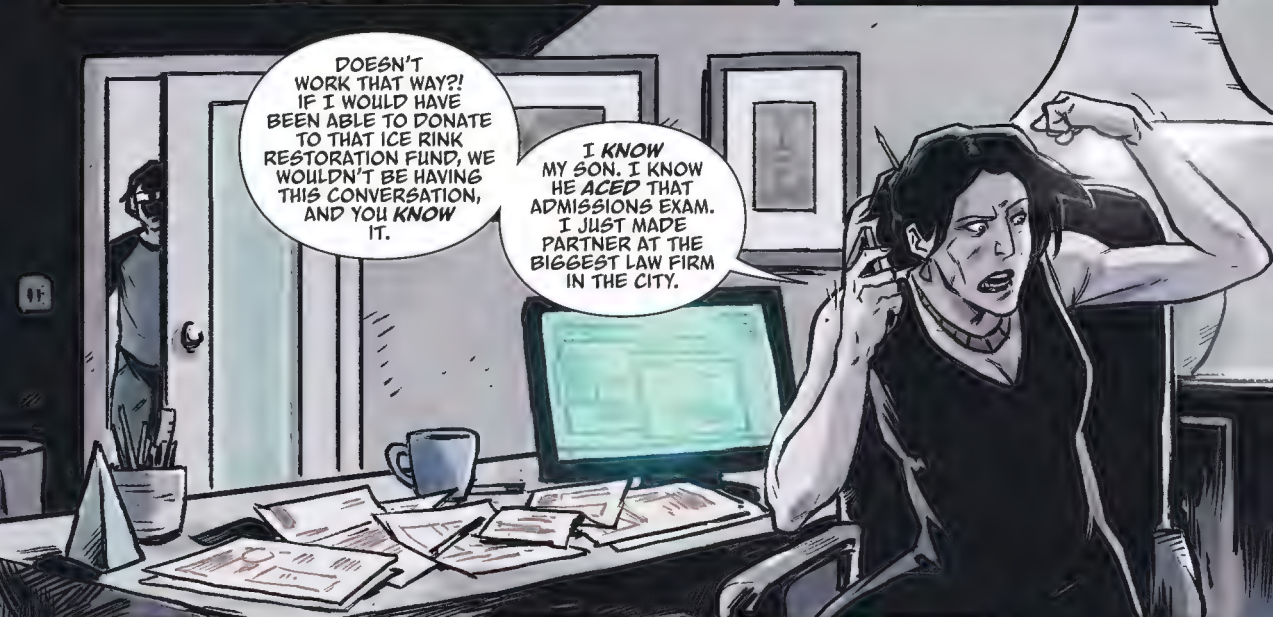






NO. I WANT YOU TO LISTEN TO ME, DAMMIT.

YOU DON'T LIKE MY TONE? WELL I DON'T LIKE YOUR TONE EITHER. I WANT TO SPEAK TO THE DEAN OF ADMISSIONS.



DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY?! IF I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DONATE TO THAT ICE RINK RESTORATION FUND, WE WOULDN'T BE HAVING THIS CONVERSATION, AND YOU KNOW IT.

I KNOW MY SON. I KNOW HE ACED THAT ADMISSIONS EXAM. I JUST MADE PARTNER AT THE BIGGEST LAW FIRM IN THE CITY.



I CAN PAY HIS TUITION EVEN WITHOUT HIS DEADBEAT FATHER...JUST BECAUSE HE'S NOT SOME SPOILED RIVER HILLS BRAT--

WHAT ABOUT HIS INTERVIEW?!

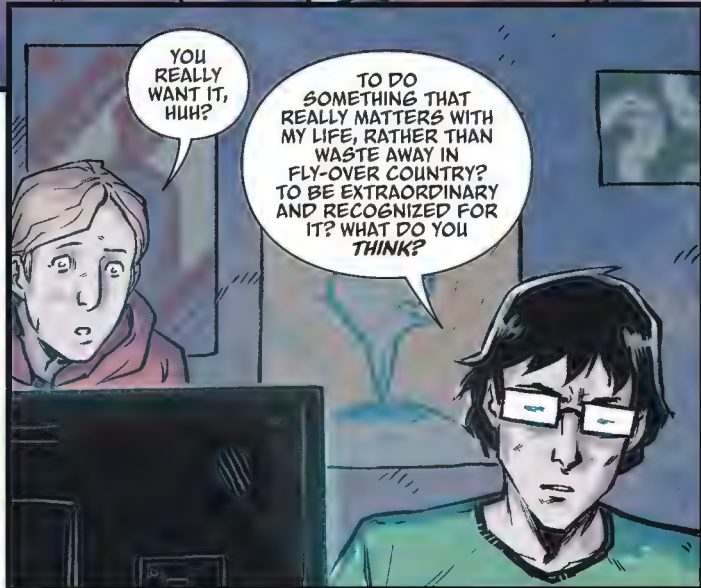


NO! YOU DON'T GET TO TELL ME MY SON IS NOT UNIVERSITY SCHOOL CALIBER!!



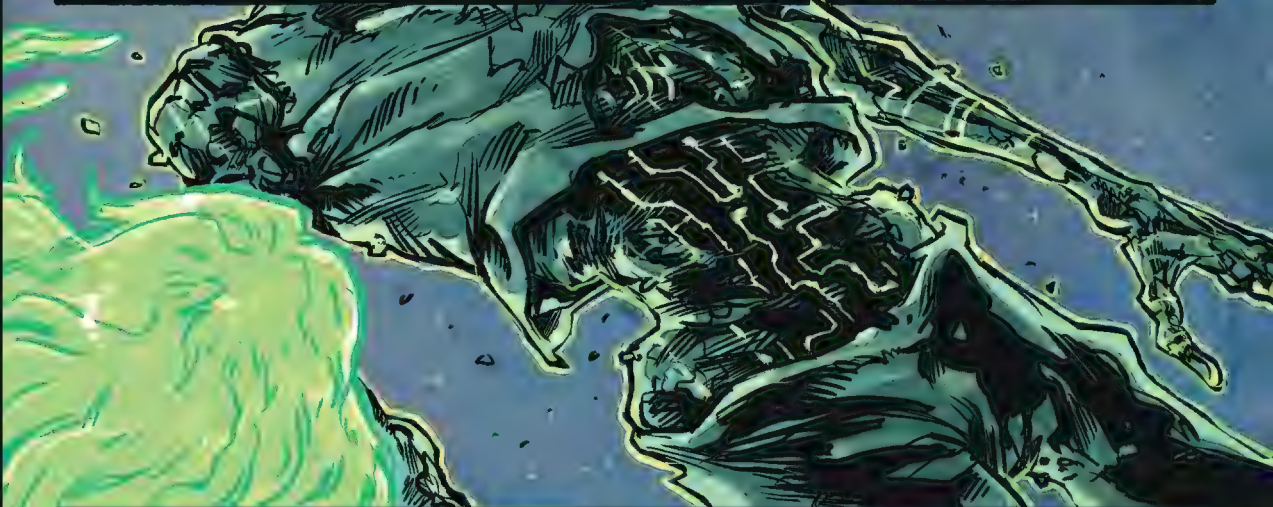
DAMMIT...

DAMMIT, ADRIAN! COME BACK HERE! THAT'S NOT WHAT SHE MEANT!

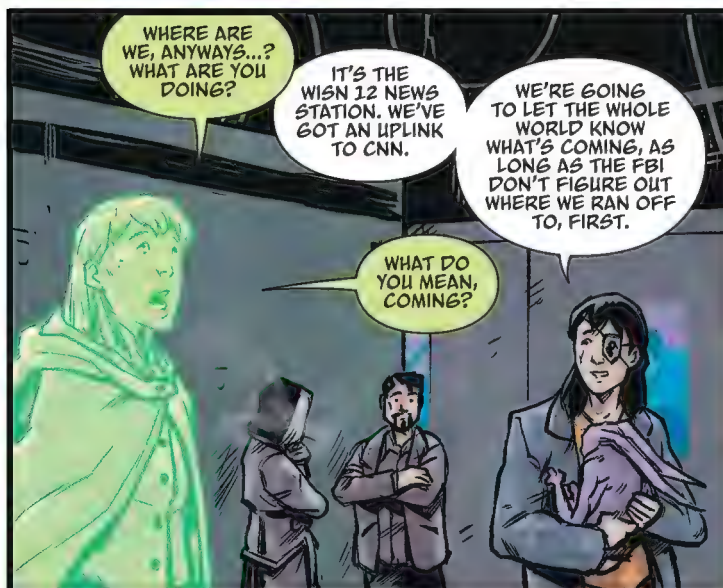


**BAY POINT.
NOW.**





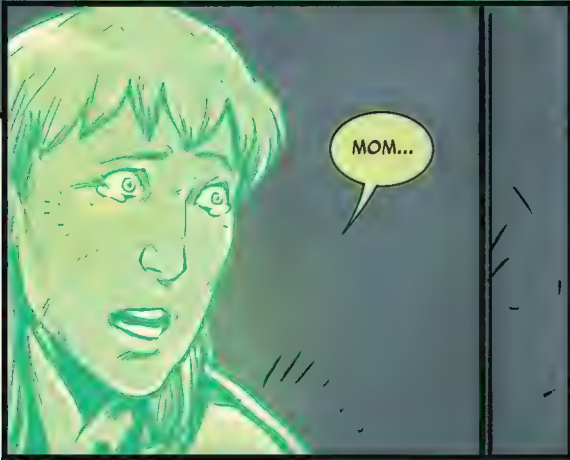






I'M SO PROUD OF YOU...JUST...JUST LOOK AT YOU NOW. YOU LOOK SO FREAKING COOL.

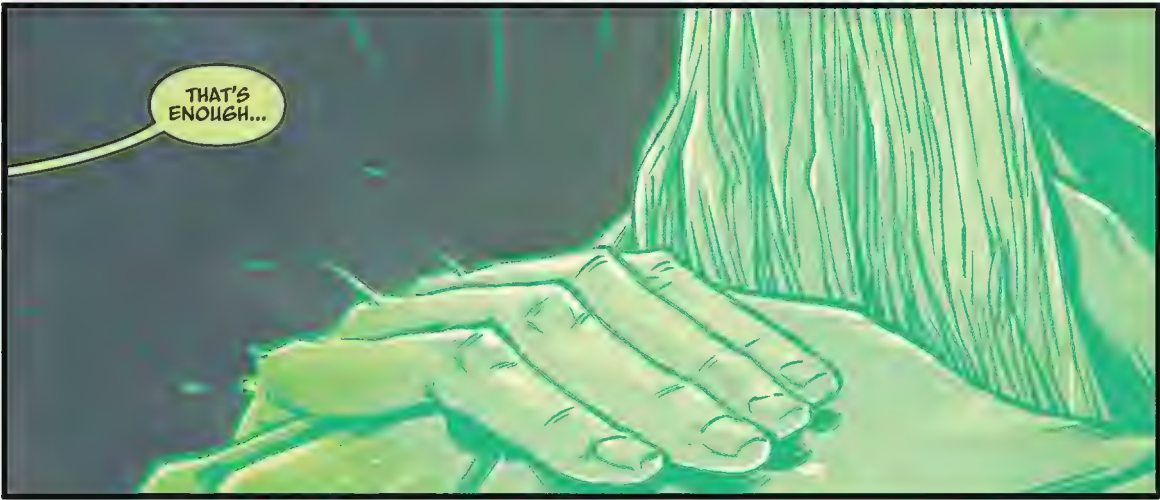
HERE I THOUGHT I'D RAISED A BIG DORK, JUST LIKE HER MOTHER.



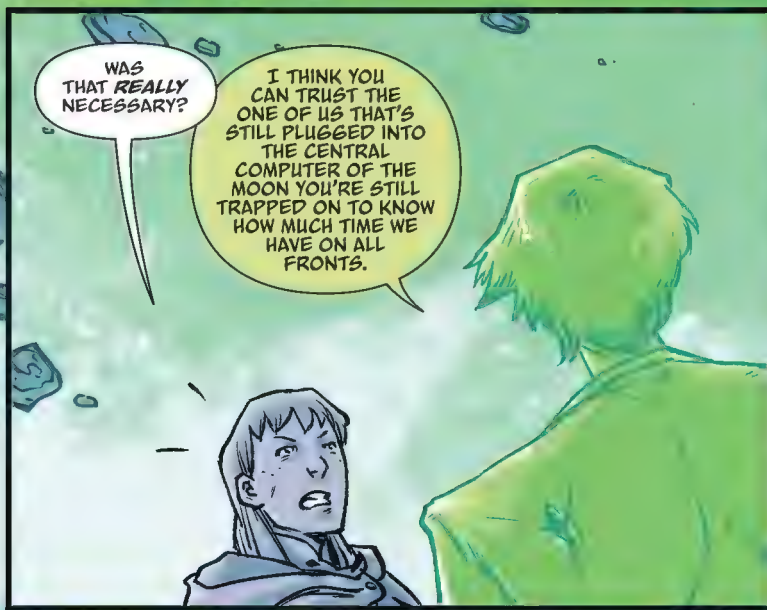
MOM...



I LOVE YOU SO MUCH.

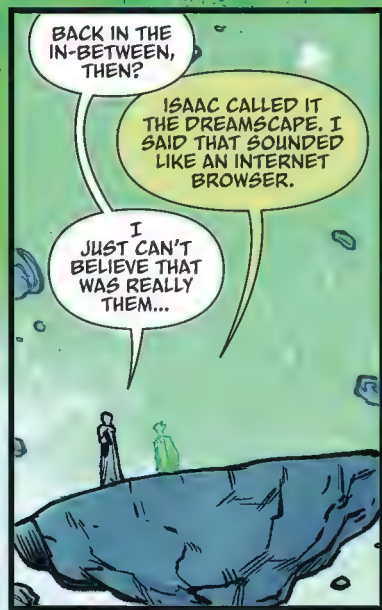


THAT'S ENOUGH...



WAS THAT **REALLY** NECESSARY?

I THINK YOU CAN TRUST THE ONE OF US THAT'S STILL PLUGGED INTO THE CENTRAL COMPUTER OF THE MOON YOU'RE STILL TRAPPED ON TO KNOW HOW MUCH TIME WE HAVE ON ALL FRONTS.



BACK IN THE IN-BETWEEN, THEN?

ISAAC CALLED IT THE DREAMSCAPE. I SAID THAT SOUNDED LIKE AN INTERNET BROWSER.

I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WAS **REALLY** THEM...



I WANT YOU TO TAKE ME BACK THERE SO BADLY, ADRIAN... I KNOW THERE'S SO MUCH I NEED TO DO... BUT I JUST WANT TO SEE THEM THERE... SAFE AND ALIVE.

IF ALL OF THIS GOES WELL, YOU'LL HAVE A LIFETIME TOGETHER.

YOU GOT TO SEE YOUR MOTHER AGAIN... THAT HAS TO MEAN SOMETHING TO YOU. YOU CAN'T BE THAT COLD.

I THINK THE PROBLEM IS THAT COLDNESS RUNS IN THE FAMILY.



MY MOTHER DOESN'T... CARE IN THE USUAL WAY. SHE CARES ABOUT RESULTS... DYING WASN'T ONE OF THE ACCEPTABLE RESULTS.

YOU SAW THAT FOR YOURSELF.



ADRIAN, THAT'S **NOT** WHAT IT IS.

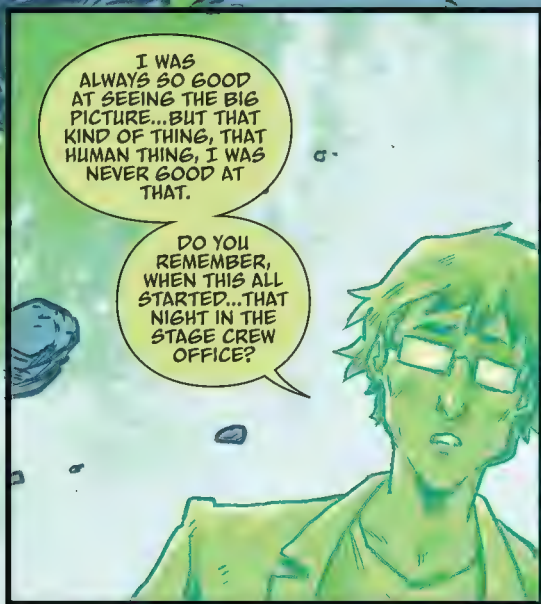
I COULD SEE IT IN HER EYES. SHE'S BARELY HOLDING IT TOGETHER. SHE JUST HAS NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON, AND YOU CAN'T BLAME HER FOR THAT.

I BARELY UNDERSTAND IT MYSELF.



YOU THINK SO?

YEAH, I **REALLY** DO.



I WAS ALWAYS SO GOOD AT SEEING THE BIG PICTURE...BUT THAT KIND OF THING, THAT HUMAN THING, I WAS NEVER GOOD AT THAT.

DO YOU REMEMBER, WHEN THIS ALL STARTED...THAT NIGHT IN THE STAGE CREW OFFICE?



OF COURSE I DO.



I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO COME INTO THE FOREST WITH ME AND THE OTHERS. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF PURPOSE YOU WOULD SERVE.

FRANKLY, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A VAPID IDIOT. JUST LIKE THE REST OF THE POPULAR GIRLS.

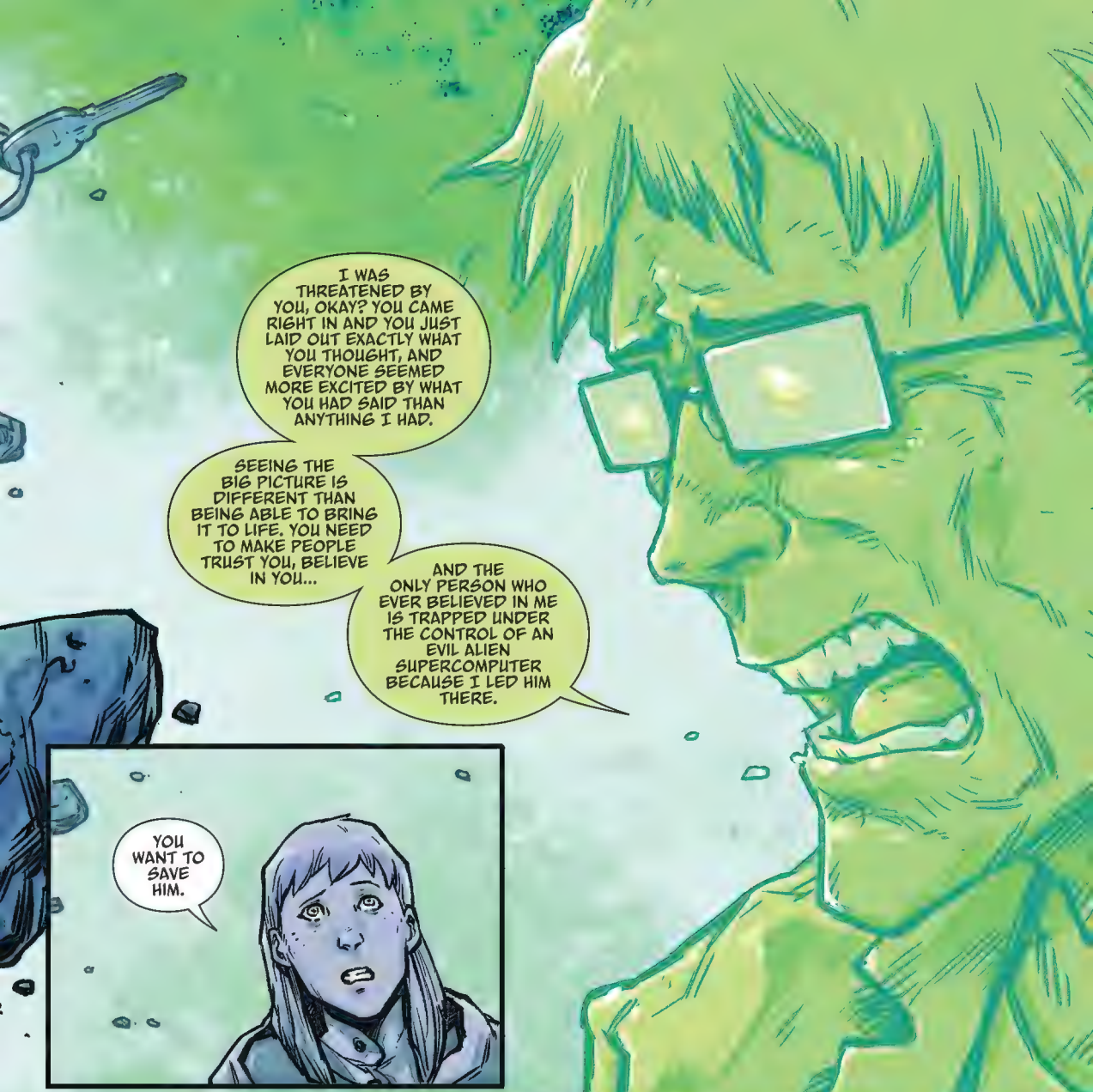


YOU THOUGHT I WAS POPULAR?

RELATIVELY SPEAKING, OF COURSE.



¿SIGH? I'M NOT TRYING TO BE RUDE...IT JUST...IT COMES NATURAL. I'M SO BAD AT--



I WAS
THREATENED BY
YOU, OKAY? YOU CAME
RIGHT IN AND YOU JUST
LAID OUT EXACTLY WHAT
YOU THOUGHT, AND
EVERYONE SEEMED
MORE EXCITED BY WHAT
YOU HAD SAID THAN
ANYTHING I HAD.

SEEING THE
BIG PICTURE IS
DIFFERENT THAN
BEING ABLE TO BRING
IT TO LIFE. YOU NEED
TO MAKE PEOPLE
TRUST YOU, BELIEVE
IN YOU...

AND THE
ONLY PERSON WHO
EVER BELIEVED IN ME
IS TRAPPED UNDER
THE CONTROL OF AN
EVIL ALIEN
SUPERCOMPUTER
BECAUSE I LED HIM
THERE.

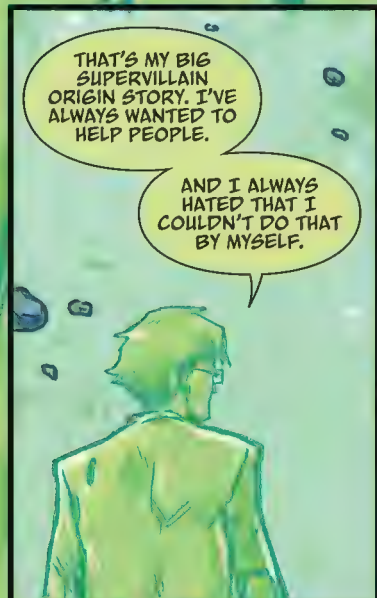


YOU
WANT TO
SAVE
HIM.



I
WANT TO SAVE
EVERYBODY.

ALL I'VE EVER
WANTED TO DO IS
SOMETHING THAT
REALLY MATTERS.
SOMETHING THAT
CHANGES PEOPLE'S
LIVES.



THAT'S MY BIG
SUPERVILLAIN
ORIGIN STORY. I'VE
ALWAYS WANTED TO
HELP PEOPLE.

AND I ALWAYS
HATED THAT I
COULDN'T DO THAT
BY MYSELF.



YOU'RE
NOT ALONE
ANYMORE.



I WASN'T
ALONE THEN...BUT
I COULDN'T SEE THAT
OTHER PEOPLE WERE
BETTER THAN ME AT
WHAT I WANTED TO
BE GOOD AT.

AND THAT'S
WHY WHAT HAPPENS
NEXT HAS TO BE
YOU, BECAUSE IT
NEVER COULD HAVE
BEEN ME.



THE A.I. DOESN'T
KNOW I WASN'T
ERASED. I WAS ABLE TO
DIVERT ONE OF ISAAC'S
BLASTS INTO A KIND OF
TELEPORTATION RAY TO
SEND SANAMI AND
DOCTOR ROBOT BACK
TO EARTH.

I HITCHED A
RIDE IN THE MIND OF
DOCTOR ROBOT. BUT,
IF I TRANSFER MY
CONSCIOUSNESS BACK
TO THE MOON, THEY'LL
KNOW THERE'S A FLAW
IN THE SYSTEM, AND
THEY'LL ERASE
ME.

THEY
ALREADY
TRIED,
ONCE.



I CAN PREPARE WHAT
WE NEED HERE, ON
EARTH, BUT I'M GOING
TO NEED YOU TO SET
THE FINAL STAGE IN
MOTION *THERE*. I NEED
YOU TO HIT THEM
WHERE IT HURTS.

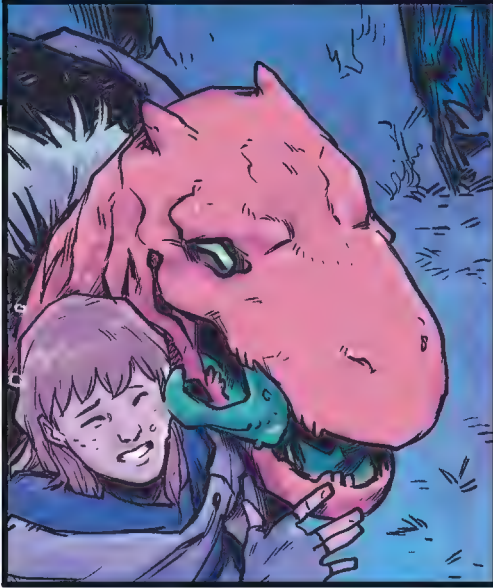
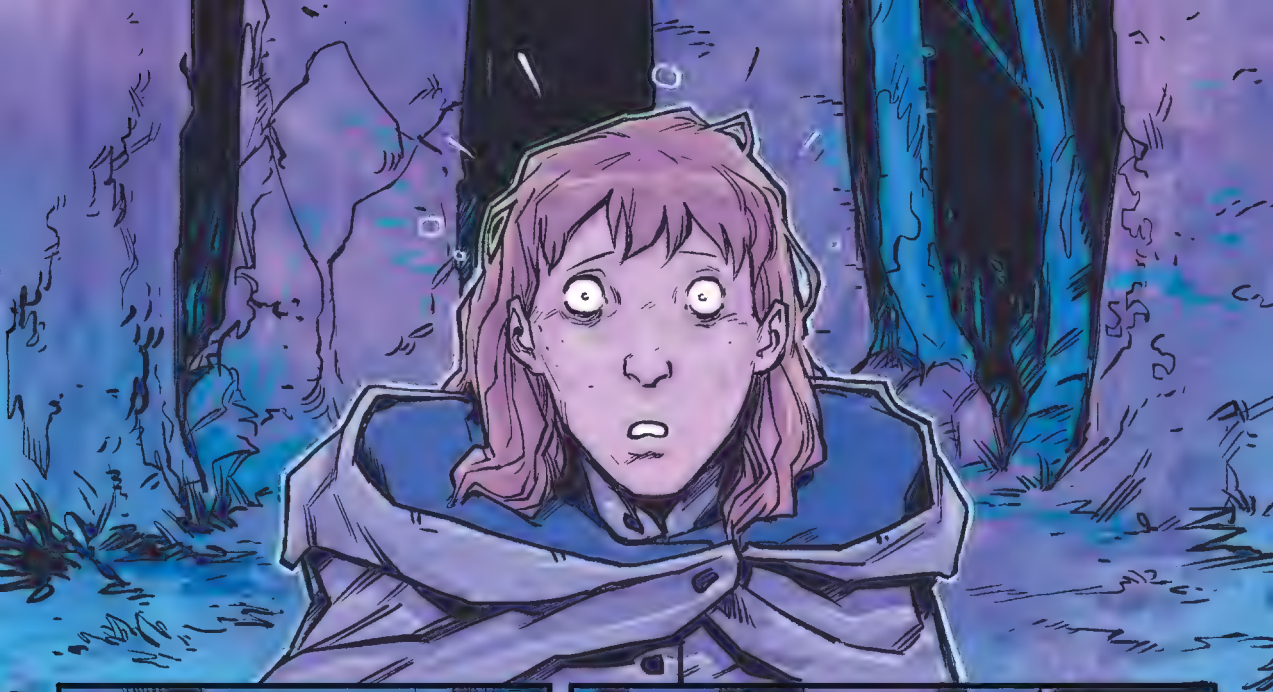


ADRIAN...HE'S TAKEN
ALL THE WILDLIFE...HOW
THE HELL DO YOU THINK
I'LL BE ABLE TO GET
INTO THE BLACK CITY
NOW?



WHO SAID
ANYTHING
ABOUT THE
BLACK
CITY?

LISTEN
CLOSE.



KAREN!
ARE YOU
ALRIGHT?!

YEAH...
YEAH, I
AM.



WHAT IS
GOING ON
HERE...?



I
THINK...

I THINK I
KNOW HOW
TO GET US
HOME...





ISAAC KNOWS
WHERE WE ARE.
HE'LL BE COMING
SOON, TO FINISH US
OFF...WE HAVE TOO
MANY WEAK AND
INJURED PEOPLE
WITH US...

WE CAN'T
MOVE THE
CAMP.

THEN
WHAT CAN
WE DO?



YOU CAN
PROTECT THEM
LONG ENOUGH
FOR ME TO SET
THINGS IN
MOTION.

I NEED
TO GO OUT INTO
THE FOREST. I
NEED TO FOLLOW
ONE LAST
MISSION.

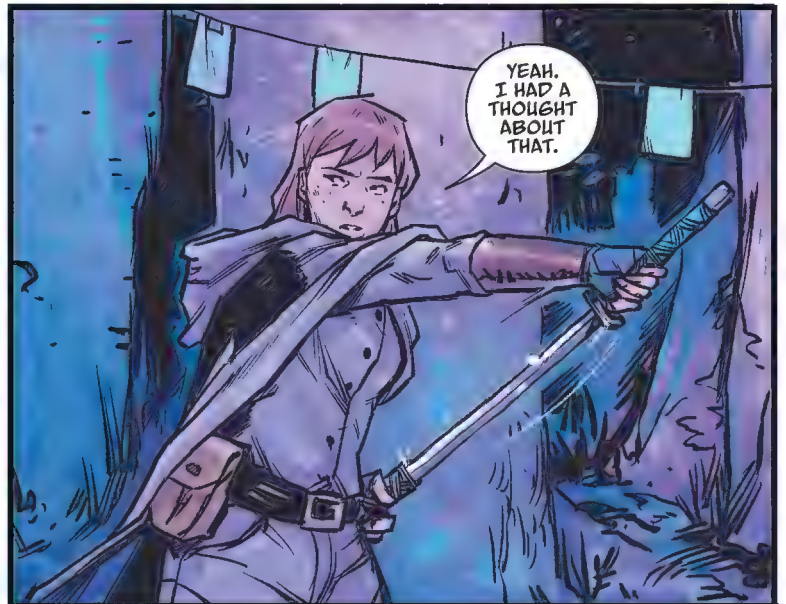


YOU WOULD
LEAVE US IN A
CAMP WITH OUR
GREATEST
ENEMIES?

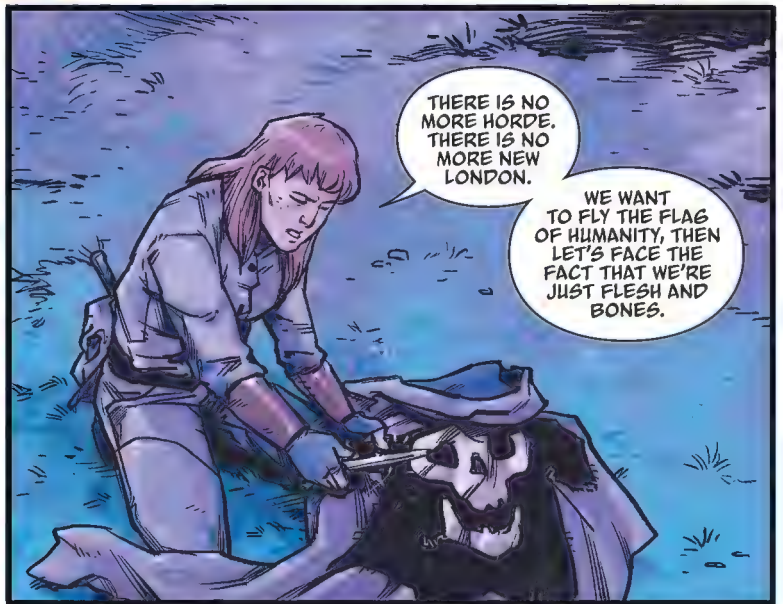
NO. I
WOULD LEAVE
YOU IN A CAMP
WITH YOUR
FELLOW
HUMANS.



THE FLAG
THEY'RE FLYING
OVER THEIR CAMP,
IT'S ONE OF THE
MOST OFFENSIVE
SYMBOLS IN OUR
CULTURE...



YEAH.
I HAD A
THOUGHT
ABOUT
THAT.

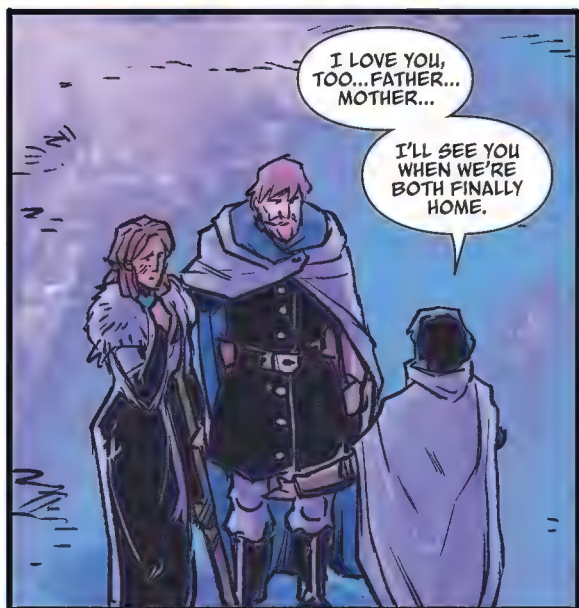


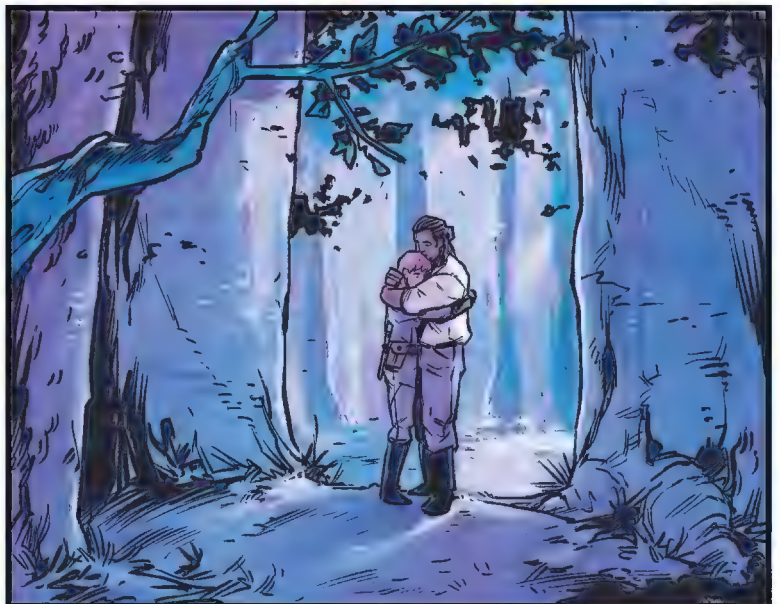


FLY
THIS
FLAG.

FIGHT
FOR ME.

SIR,
YES
SIR.









MR. OTA.

CREEPY...



SANAMI
NEEDS YOU BACK
TO SET UP THE
VIDEO PROGRAM.
AND I'D LIKE A
WORD WITH MY
MOTHER.

UH...
YEAH.
SURE.



MOTHER...

ARE...
ARE YOU
ALRIGHT?



WHAT, DID YOU
PICK UP SOME
EMPATHY ON THE
OTHER SIDE OF
THE UNIVERSE?

I THINK IT
TURNED OUT THAT
BECOMING A SOULLESS
ALIEN COMPUTER
PROGRAM MADE ME
ABOUT TWENTY
PERCENT MORE
EMPATHETIC.


WELL,
THEN SIGN
ME UP.



I'M STILL CONVINCED
I'M HAVING SOME KIND
OF PSYCHOTIC EPISODE
HERE, ADRIAN.

BUT
EVEN IF THIS
IS REAL. EVEN IF
YOUR BODY IS BURIED
HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS
OF LIGHT-YEARS AWAY
AND I'LL NEVER SEE IT
OR HOLD IT IN MY
ARMS AGAIN...

I'M JUST
SO GLAD I
GET TO HEAR
YOUR VOICE
AGAIN.



"AND THIS PLAN OF YOURS...WILL THE JACOB GIRL SURVIVE THE PATH YOU'VE JUST SET HER ON?"

"ACTUALLY, MOTHER..."



"I SET HER ON THIS PATH TWO YEARS AGO."

"NOW SHE JUST NEEDS TO FOLLOW IT TO THE END."

TO BE CONTINUED...

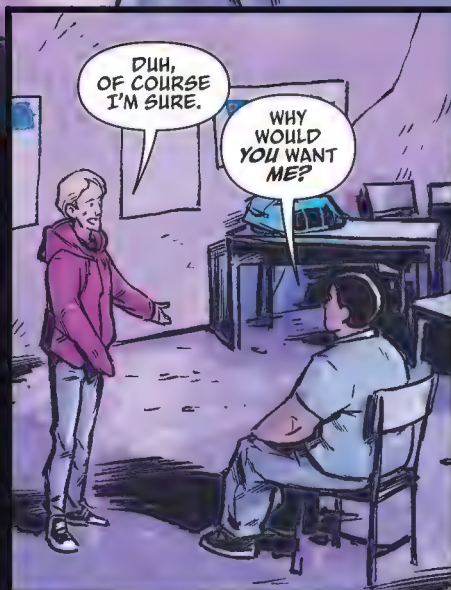
CHAPTER

THIRTY-FIVE





YOU
WANT ME?
ARE YOU
SURE?



DUH,
OF COURSE
I'M SURE.

WHY
WOULD
YOU WANT
ME?



ADRIAN ROTH
SAYS WE'RE NOT SAFE
HERE IN THE SCHOOL.
HE SENT ME TO GET
PEOPLE HE THINKS CAN
SURVIVE OUT THERE. IN
THE WOODS. BECAUSE
THAT'S WHERE WE
NEED TO GO.

I THINK
YOU WERE THE
"BIG, STRONG, SCARY
JOCK, WHO ISN'T ALL
THAT SCARY." THAT'S
WHY YOU MADE THE
LIST.



OH...
ADRIAN.

LOOK,
I DON'T
KNOW...



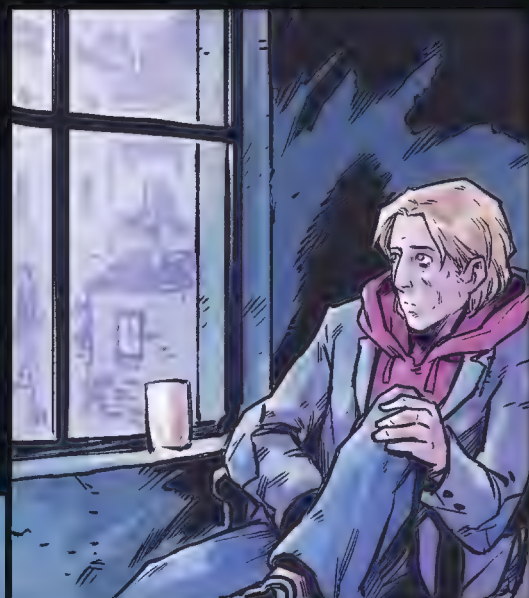
LOOK. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY
WE'RE SUDDENLY TRAPPED IN
OUTER-SPACE, BUT ADRIAN SAYS
WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET TO THE
BOTTOM OF THIS. AND YOU KNOW
WHAT? I WANT TO GET TO THE
BOTTOM OF THIS.

IT'S LIKE THE
KINDS OF STORIES
I'VE ONLY EVER READ
ABOUT. BUT YOU AND
I, WE CAN BE THE
STARS, NOT JUST THE
BACKGROUND
PLAYERS.



IT'S SCARY AS HELL, BUT IT'S
LIKE...I DON'T KNOW. IT'S LIKE
WE COULD BE THE PEOPLE
WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO
BE OUT THERE.

COME ON,
BEN. DON'T YOU
WANT TO FIND OUT
WHO YOU MIGHT
BECOME OUT HERE?
DON'T YOU WANT TO
TRY AND FIGURE
THAT OUT
TOGETHER?



HEY, I WANTED TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING...

I KNOW I HAVEN'T COME TO SEE YOU FOR A COUPLE MONTHS. BUT IT'S BECAUSE I'VE BEEN UP TO SOMETHING.

IT'S FINE, BEN.

NO, LIKE... SOMETHING FOR YOU. SOMETHING I WAS DOING FOR YOU. AND I EVEN FOUND SOMEBODY WITH A WORKING POLAROID CAMERA AT THE SCHOOL...

I PAID...I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO TELL YOU WHAT I PAID JUST TO USE IT ONCE. AND MY FINGER GOT IN THE SHOT A LITTLE.

I BUILT A HOUSE IN BAY POINT. I BUILT IT WITH MY OWN TWO HANDS...

AND I WAS THINKING...IF YOU WANTED... YOU COULD COME LIVE IN IT WITH ME?



...
I KNOW YOU'RE STILL HURTING AFTER WE LOST ADRIAN. I KNOW YOUR LIFE DOESN'T MAKE A LOT OF SENSE RIGHT NOW, AND YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BUILD IT BACK TO SOMETHING THAT MAKES SENSE.



I KNOW HOW IT FEELS NOT TO FIT IN THE WORLD. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HELPED ME COME OUT OF MY SHELL.

I THINK I CAN RETURN THE FAVOR...



I THINK PART OF GROWING UP IS RECOGNIZING THAT OTHER PEOPLE ARE NEVER GOING TO CHANGE INTO WHO YOU WANT THEM TO BE.

AND YOU'LL NEVER BE WHO THEY WANT YOU TO BE, EITHER.

KAYLA. YOU'RE TELLING THAT TO THE GUY WHOSE BOYFRIEND LEFT HIM FOR THE COMPUTER GHOST OF A GUY WHO I DON'T THINK EVER HAD ROMANTIC FEELINGS FOR ANYONE.

TRUST ME. I KNOW.

GOD, I JUST LOOK IN THE MIRROR SOME DAYS AND ALL I SEE IS DAMAGE. ALL I SEE IS THAT I AGREE WITH ISAAC. I WOULD HAVE LEFT ME, TOO.

I'LL NEVER BE THE VERSION OF MYSELF I WANT TO BE. I'LL ALWAYS BE SOME KIND OF WEAK ECHO.

NO, BEN. I THINK THAT'S BACKWARDS. BECAUSE I DO SEE THAT VERSION OF YOU. I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE DO.

YOU NEED TO LOOK AT YOURSELF RIGHT. AND YOU NEED TO SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE PEOPLE WHO SEE THAT IN YOU.

CASE IN POINT.

KAYLA! HE'LL NOTICE!

HEY! MY FRIEND WANTS TO BUY YOU A DRINK!





WHEN MY SISTER FOUND IT, MONTHS LATER, DRAWN IN BY THE STRANGE GROWLING NOISES, IT MAULED HALF HER FACE. SHE LOST AN EYE.

BY THE TIME I MANAGED TO SHOOT AN ARROW THROUGH ITS HEAD, IT WAS GOING FOR HER NECK.



I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY TO ME.

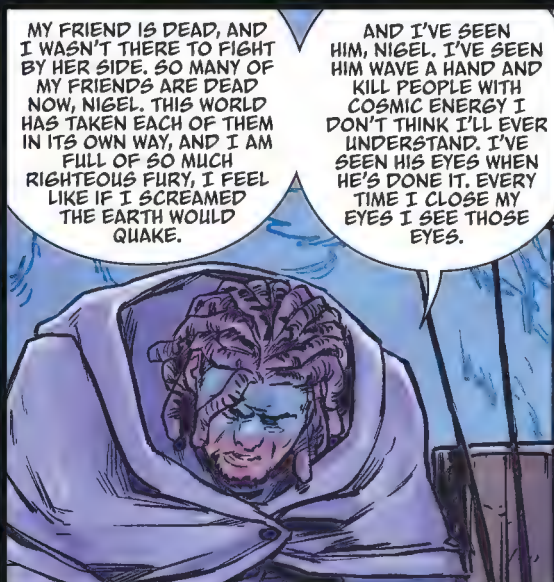
DO YOU?

YES.



I UNDERSTAND WHAT ISAAC HAS ALREADY DONE. I UNDERSTAND THAT THERE'S NO REDEMPTION FROM THAT...

DAMMIT, I JUST FOUND OUT THAT ONE OF MY BEST AND OLDEST FRIENDS, KAYLA... SHE WAS FIGHTING ALONGSIDE CLAY AND THE LAST OF THEM IN NEW LONDON. SHE DIDN'T MAKE IT HOME.



MY FRIEND IS DEAD, AND I WASN'T THERE TO FIGHT BY HER SIDE. SO MANY OF MY FRIENDS ARE DEAD NOW, NIGEL. THIS WORLD HAS TAKEN EACH OF THEM IN ITS OWN WAY, AND I AM FULL OF SO MUCH RIGHTEOUS FURY, I FEEL LIKE IF I SCREAMED THE EARTH WOULD SHAKE.

AND I'VE SEEN HIM, NIGEL. I'VE SEEN HIM WAVE A HAND AND KILL PEOPLE WITH COSMIC ENERGY I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER UNDERSTAND. I'VE SEEN HIS EYES WHEN HE'S DONE IT. EVERY TIME I CLOSE MY EYES I SEE THOSE EYES.



BUT DAMMIT, NIGEL... THAT **DOESN'T** CHANGE THE STORY. THAT **DOESN'T** CHANGE EVERYTHING HE WAS. IT **DOESN'T** CHANGE THE ENTIRE DAMN REASON I FOLLOWED HIM OUT INTO THESE WOODS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

HE SAID WE'D FIND OUT WHO WE REALLY ARE OUT HERE, BUT THERE IS **NO** PART OF ME THAT BELIEVES THAT IS WHAT HE REALLY IS. AND IF YOU'RE TELLING ME TO SHOOT AN ARROW THROUGH HIS HEART WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT?

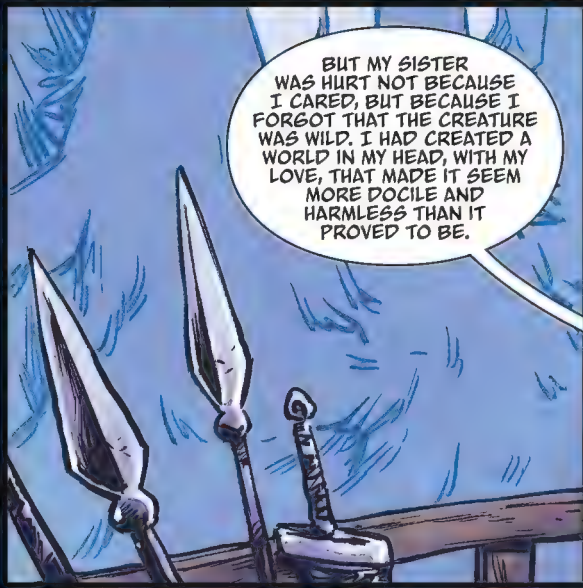
I'M SORRY. I'LL **NEVER** BE THAT PERSON.



FORGIVE ME, BENJAMIN, BUT I THINK YOU MISSED MY POINT. HAVE I EVER STRUCK YOU AS THE MAN WHO WOULD SAY THAT YOU MUST SLIT A YOUNG CREATURE'S THROAT WITHOUT SEEING IF IT COULD BE MADE WELL?

NO. WE'VE ALL BEEN THAT LITTLE, TREMBLING CREATURE OUT IN THE BRUSH. WE ALL LASH OUT. WE ALL HURT EACH OTHER.

EACH OF US IS WILD IN OUR OWN WAY.



BUT MY SISTER WAS HURT NOT BECAUSE I CARED, BUT BECAUSE I FORGOT THAT THE CREATURE WAS WILD. I HAD CREATED A WORLD IN MY HEAD, WITH MY LOVE, THAT MADE IT SEEM MORE DOCILE AND HARMLESS THAN IT PROVED TO BE.



IT WAS MY WILLING IGNORANCE OF WHAT IT COULD BE THAT SCARRED ME AND MY SISTER FOR LIFE.

I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER THAT.



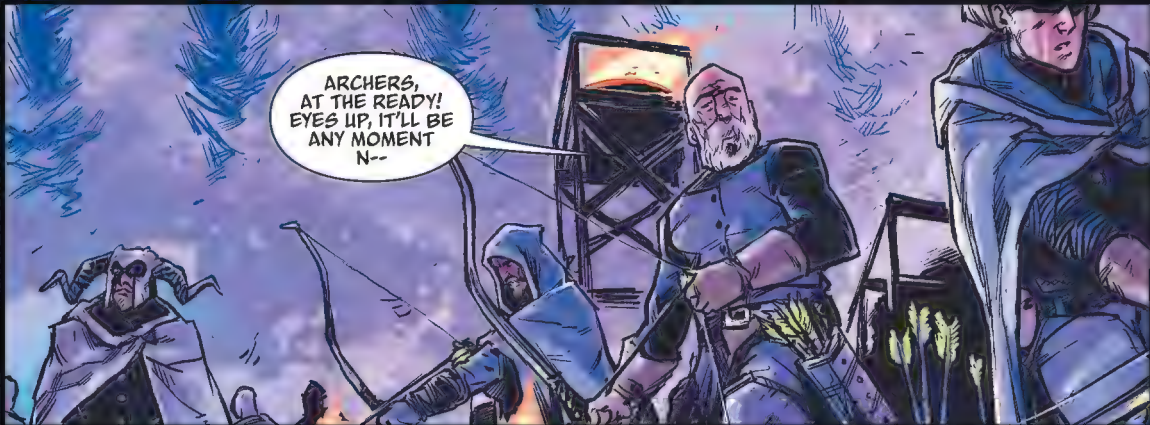
THE PEOPLE ARE ARMED AND READY?

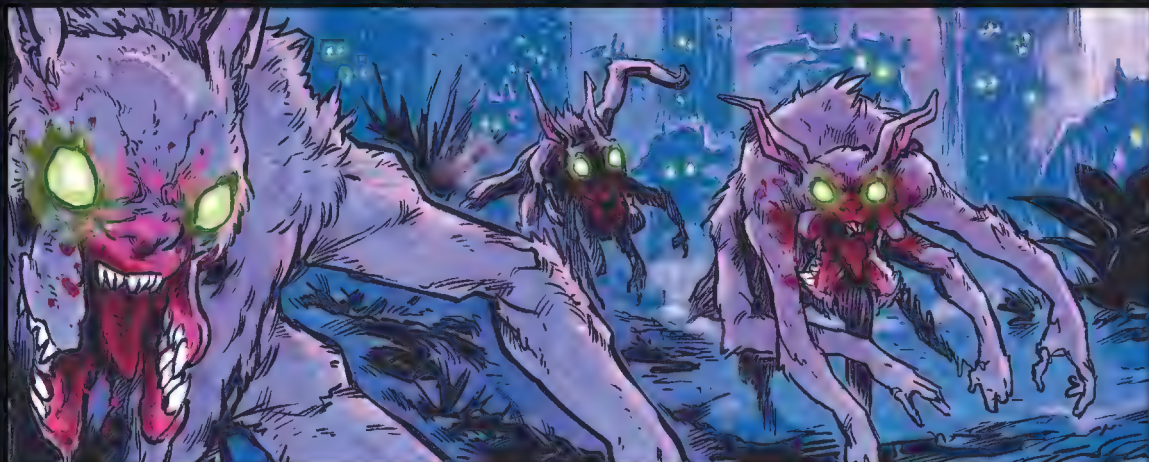
YES. OUR YOUNGEST ARE IN THE CENTER RING, OUR BEST FIGHTERS ARE FORMING A BARRICADE.

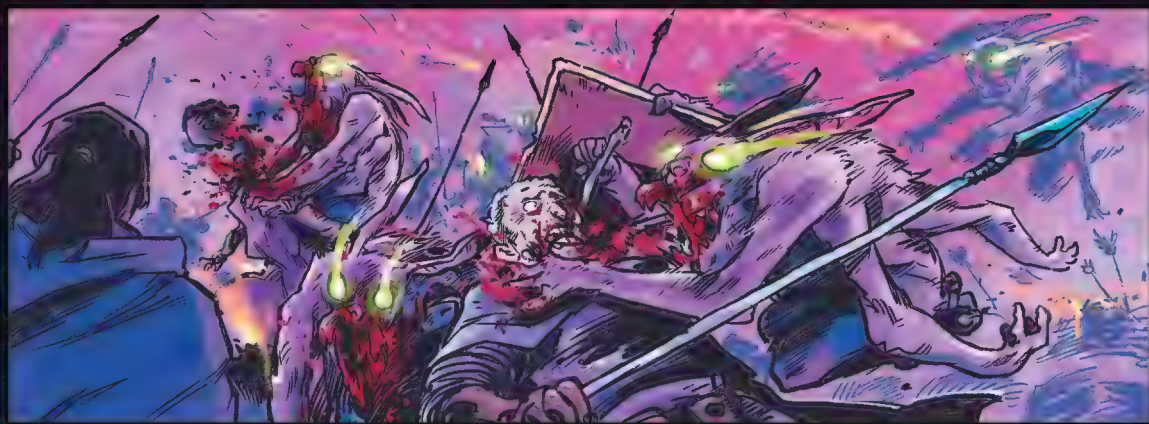


GO TO THEM. TELL THEM TO CLOSE RANKS. THE AIR ASSAULT WILL COME FIRST. I NEED TO START MOVING.











DO YOU
THINK IT'S
STARTED?

BY NOW?
YEAH.

THE QUIET IS EVEN WORSE
THAN BEFORE. IT'S LIKE
THE WORLD IS MUFFLING THE
SCREAMS, MASKING THE
HORROR, SO WE WON'T
SEE IT COMING.

YOU'RE
SURE THIS IS
THE RIGHT PLACE,
KAREN? I DON'T
LIKE THE FEEL
OF IT.



¿Dónde está amos?

THIS IS THE
FIRST PLACE ADRIAN
TOOK US, WHEN WE GOT
LOST IN THE WOODS. IT'S
IN A DIRECT LINE FROM
THE BLACK STONE AT
BAY POINT.

THE
ARROW,
POINTING
THE WAY.



IT'S STRANGE. BOTH
OF THE MEN I WAS
HERE WITH LAST ARE
DEAD. CALDER.
ADRIAN...

I'M NOT
SURE ADRIAN
EXACTLY
COUNTS.

THIS WAS THE
FIRST REAL SIGN
THAT WE WEREN'T THE
FIRST HUMANS TAKEN
OUT INTO THESE WOODS.
ALL THESE DIFFERENT
LANGUAGES...ALL
WONDERING WHERE
THEY WERE...



I GUESS I'M NO
DIFFERENT...WHY ARE
WE HERE, KAREN?
I DON'T EVEN THINK
NEW LONDON HAD
RECORDS THIS PLACE
EXISTED.

BUT THERE'S
A MESSAGE IN
ENGLISH, PLAIN AS
DAY. IT'S ALMOST LIKE
THEY KNEW THEY
COULDN'T TIP THEIR
HAND, BUT THEY
DIDN'T KNOW
WHY.



WHY
ARE
WE HERE?



SO MANY
DRAWN TO THIS
PLACE, UNCERTAIN
WHY IT MATTERED.
NO SIGN OF WHY IT'S
IMPORTANT, ASIDE
FROM THE MOST
OBVIOUS ONE.



THE
INVERTED
BLACK STONE.
UPROOTED,
POINTING
DOWN.



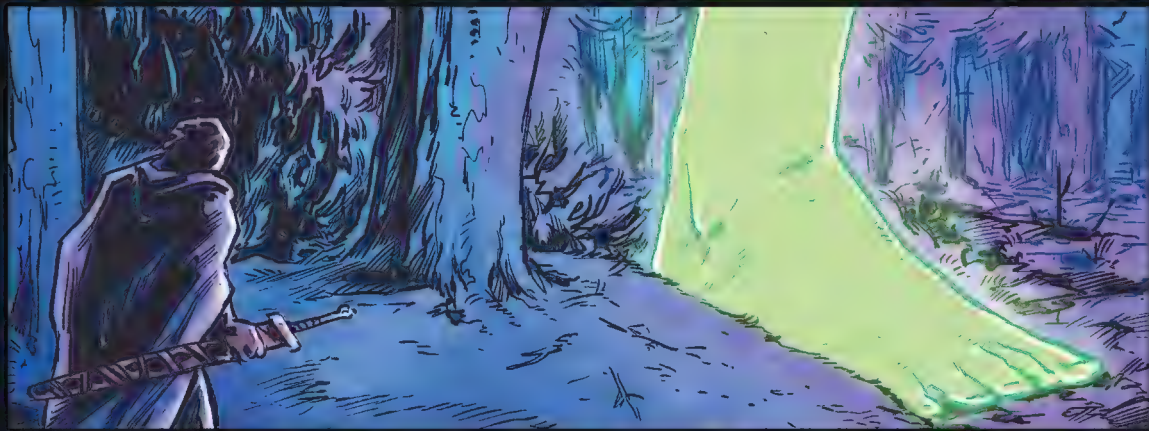
WHAT WE DIDN'T
REALIZE IS THAT THE
MAYANS WHO WERE
TAKEN HERE OVER
SEVENTEEN-HUNDRED
YEARS AGO HAD LEFT
A MESSAGE.

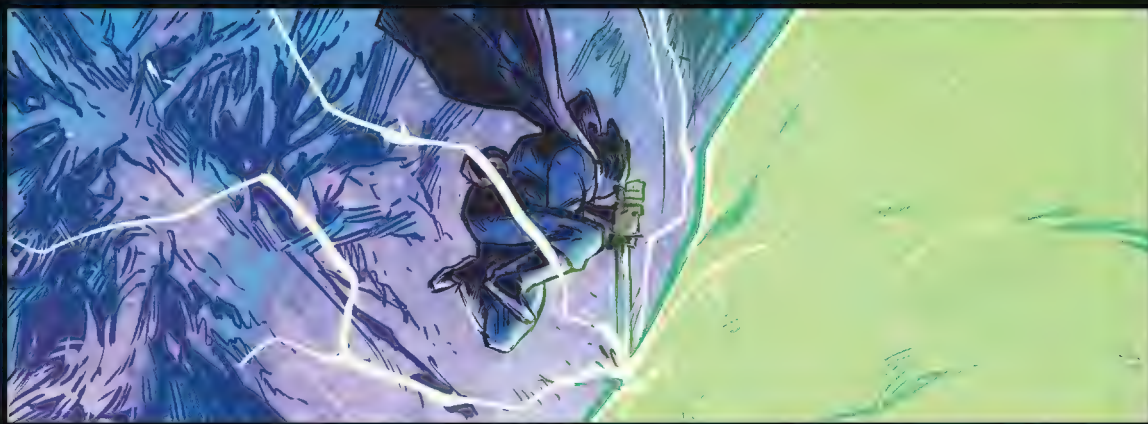
A
MESSAGE?

WE NEED
TO GO DOWN.
RIGHT INTO THE
HEART OF THIS
WORLD.



THAT'S
WHERE WE
CAN KILL
IT.

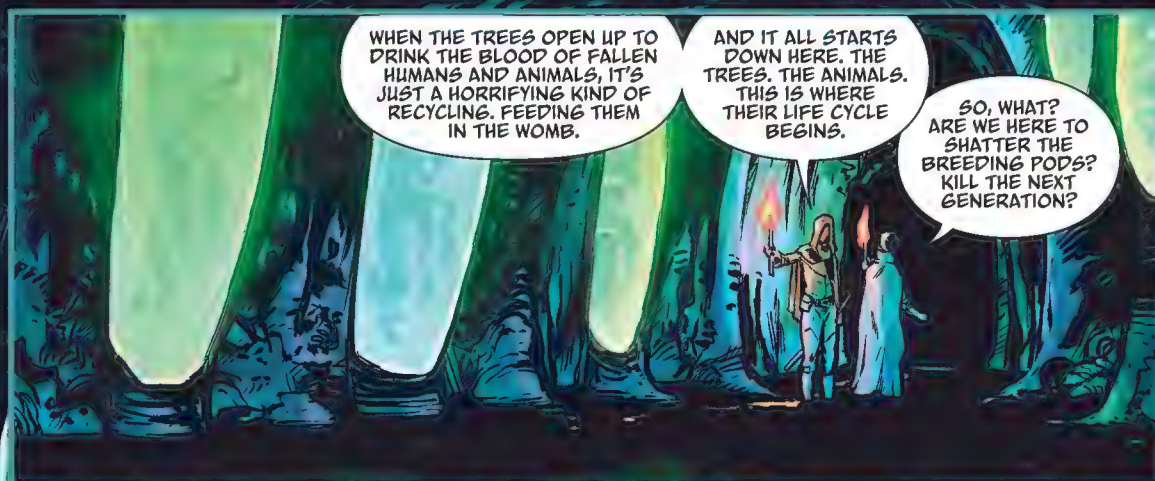






OH MY GOD...HAS THIS BEEN UNDER OUR FEET THE ENTIRE TIME?

BASED ON WHAT ADRIAN TOLD ME, YEAH. THE WHOLE MOON IS ARTIFICIAL, AND WEAPONIZED TO HUNT AND KILL HUMAN BEINGS, SPECIFICALLY. IT'S BEEN TAKING SAMPLES OF EARTH-BASED LIFEFORMS AND REBREEDING THEM INTO SPECIALIZED WEAPONS.



WHEN THE TREES OPEN UP TO DRINK THE BLOOD OF FALLEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS, IT'S JUST A HORRIFYING KIND OF RECYCLING, FEEDING THEM IN THE WOMB.

AND IT ALL STARTS DOWN HERE. THE TREES. THE ANIMALS. THIS IS WHERE THEIR LIFE CYCLE BEGINS.

SO, WHAT? ARE WE HERE TO SHATTER THE BREEDING PODS? KILL THE NEXT GENERATION?



NO. THERE ARE TOO MANY, AND HONESTLY, I THINK IF WE TRIED TAMPERING WITH ANY OF THEM, THE COMPUTER MIGHT SET THEM ALL ON US.

I JUST HAVE A HARD TIME WITH THIS. THE ENTIRE PLANET, IT'S BEEN WATCHING ME AND TRYING TO KILL ME EVERY DAY SINCE I WAS BORN.

PLAYING SOME KIND OF HORRIBLE GAME WITH MY ENTIRE FAMILY. OUR ENTIRE SPECIES.



IT'S FUNNY. CALDER SAID AS MUCH WHEN WE FIRST CAME TO THE TEMPLE. BUT I COULDN'T BELIEVE HIM, THEN. I DON'T THINK I WANTED TO LET MYSELF THINK IT WAS TRUE.



SO, WHAT WAS ADRIAN'S PLAN, ANYWAYS? WHAT ARE WE HERE TO DO.

SOMETHING VERY STUPID AND VERY DANGEROUS.



EVERY SITE WHERE HUMANS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE FROM EARTH SITS OVER WHAT ADRIAN CALLED A TRANSPORTATION PLANE. THE BLACK ROCKS SERVE AS A FOCAL POINT FOR THE ENERGY, TO LAND THE BUILDINGS AND COMMUNITIES SAFELY ON THE PLANET.

BUT THE POWER COMES FROM DOWN HERE, FROM THE COMPUTER ITSELF.



WE ARE GOING TO NEED TO MOVE THE TELEPORTATION PLANE UNDER THE MAYAN TEMPLE TO WHERE ISAAC IS FIGHTING THE LAST HUMANS ON THE PLANET.

AND THEN WE HAVE TO ACTIVATE IT.

OKAY, THEN. IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO THAT...WHY DID YOU NEED ME TO COME? I DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE ANY KIND OF COMPUTER...





STOP
PRETENDING
YOU CAN'T HEAR
ME, ISAAC.
I KNOW YOU
CAN...

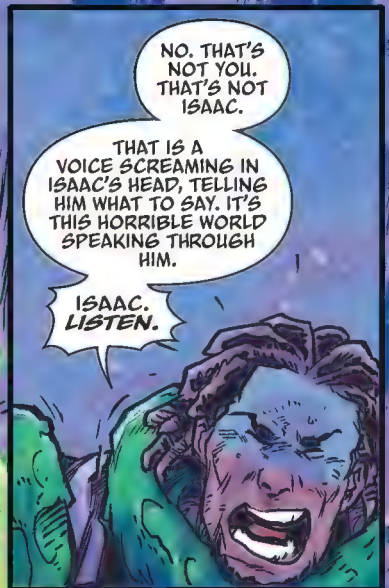
YOUR
ANIMALS ARE
DOING ALL THE
WORK. COME BACK
DOWN TO EARTH.
FACE ME AS
YOURSELF.



YOU WANT ME
TO ACKNOWLEDGE
YOU, BENJAMIN?



VERY
WELL.



NO. THAT'S
NOT YOU.
THAT'S NOT
ISAAC.

THAT IS A
VOICE SCREAMING IN
ISAAC'S HEAD, TELLING
HIM WHAT TO SAY. IT'S
THIS HORRIBLE WORLD
SPEAKING THROUGH
HIM.

ISAAC.
LISTEN.



IT'S TOO LATE.
THIS IS WHAT I
AM NOW. THIS IS
WHAT I HAVE
TO DO...



I KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE FEELING!
LISTEN TO ME.

I KNOW YOU
THINK YOU'VE BEEN
POWERLESS YOUR
ENTIRE LIFE, AND
THIS HORRIBLE PLACE
IS GIVING YOU A
CHANCE TO BE
POWERFUL.

BUT IT'S
TWISTING YOU
INTO SOMETHING
MONSTROUS.
SOMETHING THAT
YOU HAVE NEVER,
AND *SHOULD*
NEVER BE.



YOU
DON'T
KNOW
THAT...



THEY ARE
IN YOUR HEAD,
TWISTING YOUR
MIND AROUND
LIKE THEY DID
ADRIAN'S.



ADRIAN...

YOU ONCE
TRIED TO STOP
HIM FROM KILLING A
SINGLE PERSON,
AND YOU'VE KILLED
HUNDREDS.



NO...

THE ONLY
REASON YOU CAN
MANIPULATE THIS
POWER IS THAT YOU
LOVED YOUR BEST
FRIEND SO MUCH THAT
HE WAS ABLE TO LIVE
ON INSIDE YOUR
MIND.

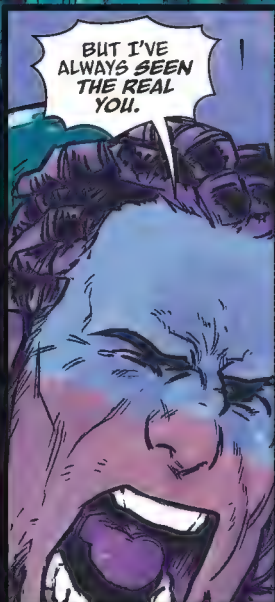


IT'S THIS
HORRIBLE PLACE.
IT'S EATING YOU FROM
THE INSIDE OUT,
DESPERATELY TRYING
TO MAKE YOU WIN THE
GAME IT SET IN
MOTION THOUSANDS
OF YEARS AGO!

THEN IT'S
GOING TO GO TO
EARTH, AND TRANSFORM
EVERYONE THERE INTO
WHAT IT'S MADE YOU
INTO. SO IT CAN GET
BACK TO CONQUERING
THE UNIVERSE LIKE IT
WAS PROGRAMMED
TO DO!



YOU THINK YOU'RE NOT
STRONG ENOUGH TO
FIGHT BACK. YOU THINK
THAT YOU'RE JUST THIS
WEAK ECHO OF THE
PERSON YOU WANTED
TO BE, SO YOU'RE JUST
SINKING BACK AND
LETTING IT TAKE THE
CONTROLS.

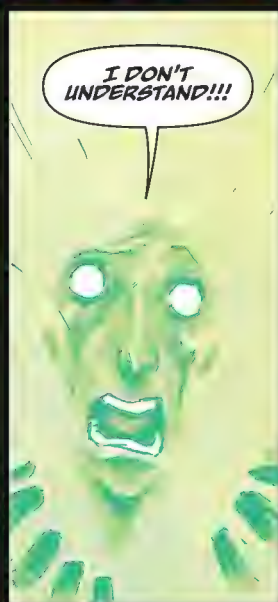


BUT I'VE
ALWAYS *SEEN*
THE REAL
YOU.



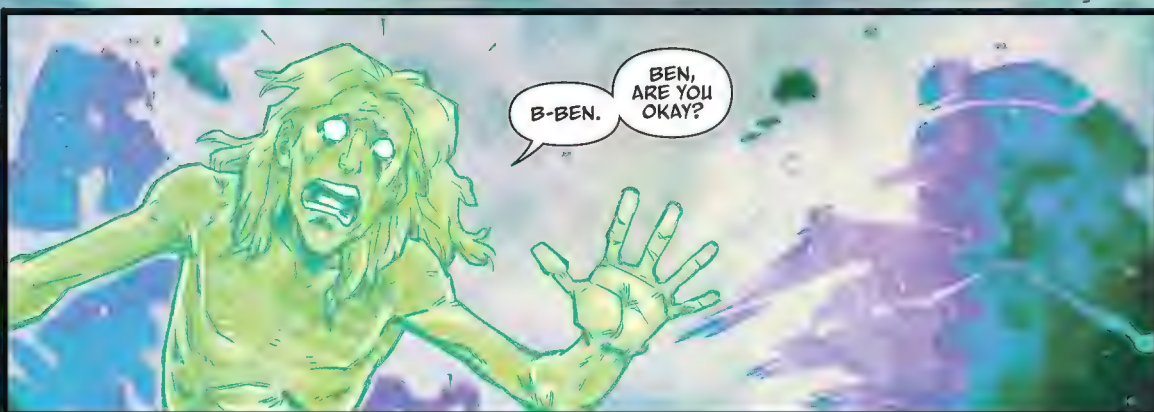
NO...

NO, I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...



I DON'T
UNDERSTAND!!!

AAAAARGHHH!





I HAVE A
MESSAGE
FOR YOU,
FROM ADRIAN
ROTH.

"THIS
IS REALLY
GOING TO
HURT."

TO BE CONCLUDED...

CHAPTER

THIRTY-SIX





I REMEMBER WALKING THROUGH THE DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME. I WAS SO DAMN SCARED.

IT WASN'T THAT I DIDN'T KNOW ANYBODY. I HAD CHOSEN CLASSES WITH MY BEST FRIENDS A FEW MONTHS EARLIER. IT WAS SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THAT.


I KNEW I WAS GOING TO WALK IN THAT BUILDING ONE PERSON, AND WALK OUT ANOTHER, AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHO THAT PERSON WAS GOING TO BE.

I WAS AFRAID OF HER. THAT UNKNOWN SANAMI.



ARE YOU STILL AFRAID?

HAH. MY FACE IS BEING BROADCAST ALL OVER THE COUNTRY SAYING ALIENS EXIST AND THEY MIGHT BE COMING TO INVADRE AND DESTROY THE EARTH. OF COURSE I'M AFRAID.



YOU KNOW, THAT FEELING NEVER REALLY GOES AWAY. YOU FORGET IT SOMETIMES, BUT IT NEVER GOES AWAY.

WE THINK OF THINGS IN BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS, BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT WE JUST KEEP GOING, AND WE NEVER REALLY KNOW WHAT PERSON WE'LL BE TOMORROW.



NOTHING REALLY ENDS.

NOT REALLY.



UNTIL IT DOES.

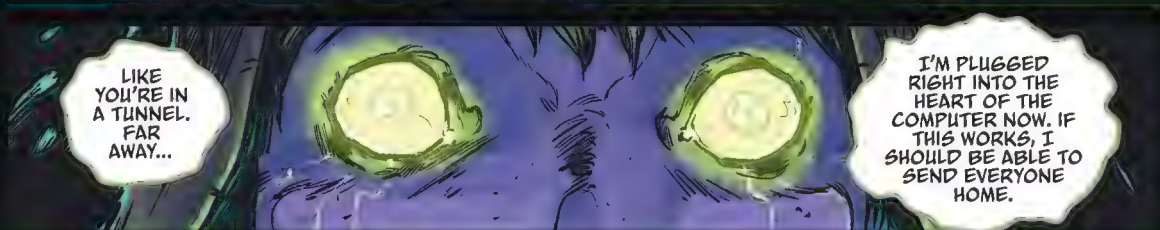


YEAH... UNTIL IT DOES.



KAREN...

KAREN,
CAN YOU
HEAR
ME?



LIKE
YOU'RE IN
A TUNNEL.
FAR
AWAY...

I'M PLUGGED
RIGHT INTO THE
HEART OF THE
COMPUTER NOW. IF
THIS WORKS, I
SHOULD BE ABLE TO
SEND EVERYONE
HOME.



I THINK THE
COMPUTER JUST
FIGURED OUT
YOU'RE HERE. AND
I DON'T THINK
IT'S HAPPY ABOUT
WHATEVER YOU'RE
DOING.

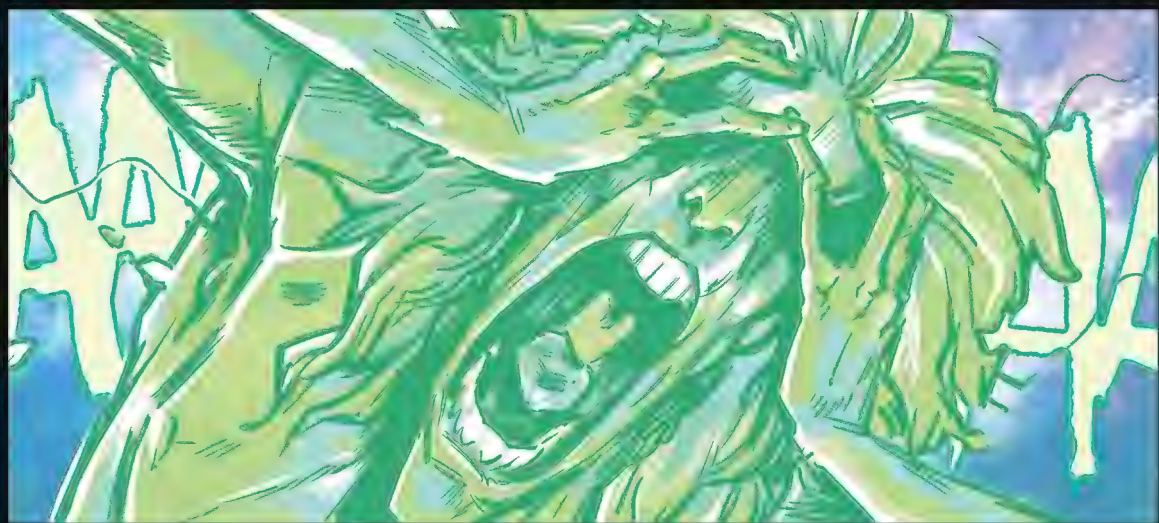
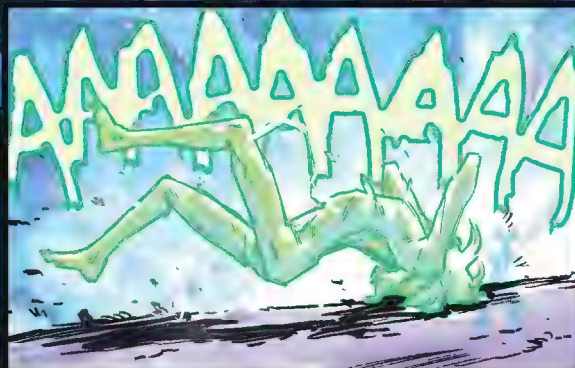
CAN'T...
BREAK...
FOCUS...

IT'S
STARTING.



IT
CERTAINLY
IS.



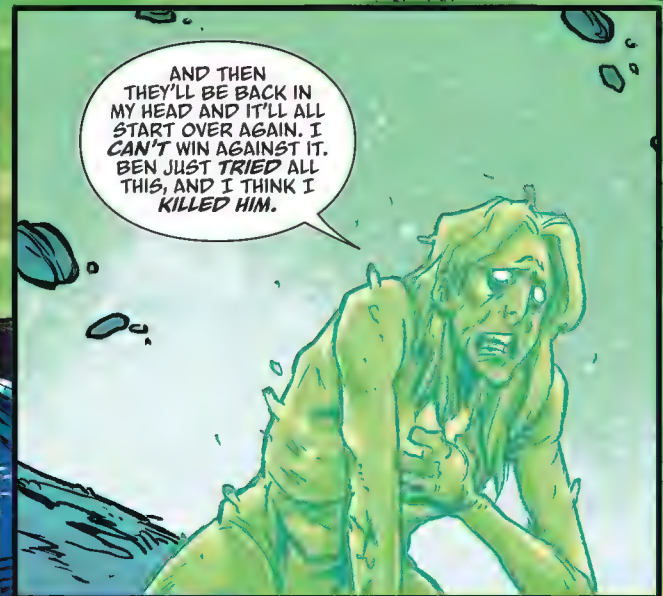




WHAT...
ARE YOU
DOING...
TO ME...



KAREN...
I CAN STILL FEEL
ALL THE ANIMALS...
THE COMPUTER, IT'S
SENDING THEM AFTER
YOU. IT'LL KILL
SANDER. KILL
YOU.



AND THEN
THEY'LL BE BACK IN
MY HEAD AND IT'LL ALL
START OVER AGAIN. I
CAN'T WIN AGAINST IT.
BEN JUST TRIED ALL
THIS, AND I THINK I
KILLED HIM.



THE ALIEN
COMPUTER HAS BEEN
REWRITING YOUR MIND
FOR WEEKS NOW, ISAAC.
SHUTTING DOWN YOUR
MORAL AND EMPATHIC
CENTERS. MAKING
YOU LIKE IT.

FOR THE
MOMENT, ANYWAY,
I'M STANDING IN ITS
WAY. MAKING YOUR
BRAIN WIRE ITSELF
BACK THE RIGHT
WAY.

WHY??



WHY ARE YOU
EVEN DOING
THIS TO ME? I
CAN'T HANDLE
THIS.

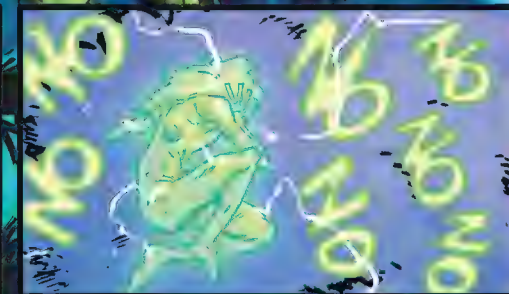


YEAH, WELL,
SOMEBODY
THINKS YOU
CAN.



SO YOU CAN UNDERSTAND
THAT YOU'RE ITS GUINEA PIG.
IT WANTS TO MAKE **EVERYONE**
BACK HOME INTO SOMETHING
LIKE YOU. ENGINES OF DEATH
THAT CAN TEAR DOWN
CIVILIZATIONS ACROSS
THE UNIVERSE.

YOU'RE
JUST THE TEST RUN,
AND YOU'RE ALREADY ON
THE VERGE OF KILLING
THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE.
I DON'T WANT THAT
TO HAPPEN. DO
YOU?



GOOD.



SOMEBODY...



HELLO, ISAAC.



ADRIAN...

YES.

I THOUGHT... I THOUGHT THE COMPUTER KILLED YOU.



AND YOU THOUGHT I WASN'T CLEVER ENOUGH TO ESCAPE? I'M INSULTED.



ISAAC...YOUR MIND IS PUTTING UP A FIGHT AGAINST A SUPERCOMPUTER THE SIZE OF THE MOON. I KNOW YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT THAT TAKES EXTRAORDINARY STRENGTH.

NOT ENOUGH. I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH.



ISAAC, NEITHER WAS I.



OH GOD, ADRIAN... I THINK...I THINK I HURT A LOT OF PEOPLE. I THINK I'M STILL HURTING A LOT OF PEOPLE.

YES. I'M SORRY. YOU ARE.



I WANT TO SAY THAT IT'S NOT WHAT I WANTED...BUT DEEP DOWN, I THINK I DID. I THINK I WAS SO SAD, AND SO ANGRY. I THINK THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PART OF ME THAT EVEN ENJOYED IT.

JUST ENJOYED THAT POWER. FEELING LIKE FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE I WAS IMPORTANT. I WAS WINNING. I WAS UNSTOPPABLE. OH GOD, IT FELT SO GOOD JUST LETTING IT TELL ME WHAT TO DO.



I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT IT WANTED ME TO BE. I NEVER WAS. I WISH I WAS STRONGER.

GOD, I WISH THAT SO HARD I COULD SCREAM.



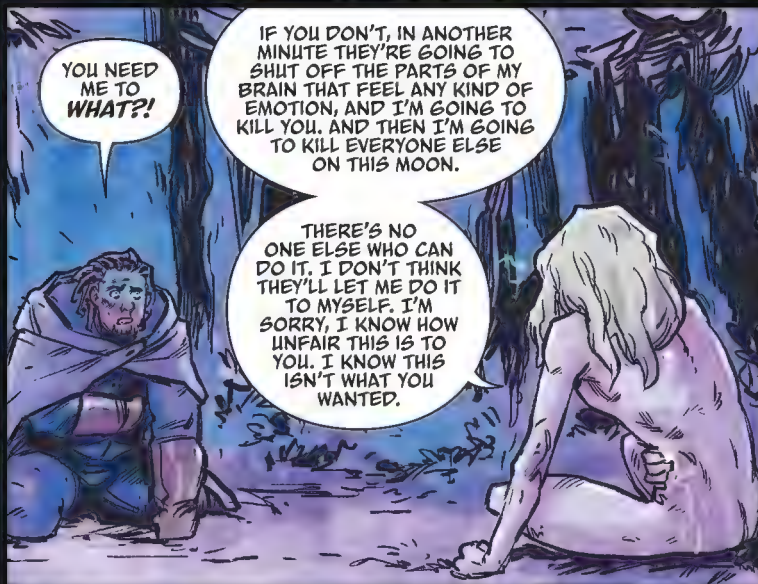
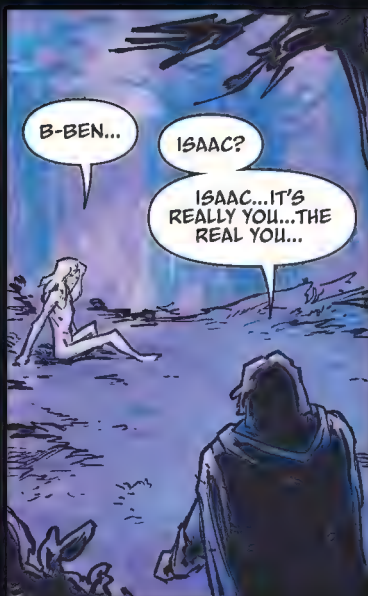
SOMETIMES WE FAIL. SOMETIMES WE FAIL SPECTACULARLY. BUT WE'RE HUMAN. I THINK...AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, I THINK FAILING IS PART OF THE PACKAGE.



HOW CAN I HELP NOW, AFTER EVERYTHING?! WHAT IN THE WORLD CAN I DO NOW??



ONE LAST THING.

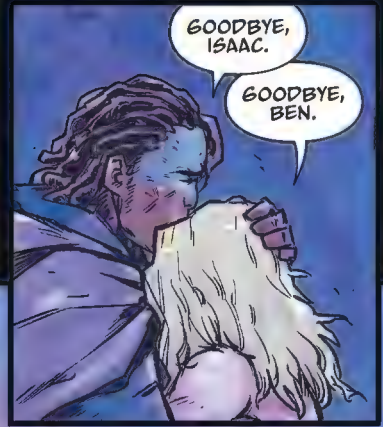




I WILL.



I CAN FEEL THEM
COMING, REASSERTING
THEIR POWER... YOU NEED
TO DO IT NOW.



GOODBYE,
ISAAC.

GOODBYE,
BEN.



KRK!





GOD, I
HOPE THAT'S
A GOOD
SIGN.



I CAN FEEL IT
NOW...THE WHOLE
SYSTEM IS AT MY
FINGERTIPS...

IT'S MORE
BEAUTIFUL THAN
YOU EVER
DESCRIBED IT,
ADRIAN.



ADRIAN?



NO.
NO MORE
ADRIAN.

YOU
FACE THE
WORLD.



AHHH...

REWIRING
YOUR LANGUAGE
CENTERS.
IMPERATIVE YOU
UNDERSTAND.



YOU WERE
MEANT TO BE IT.
ACQUISITION OF GREATEST
POWER IN UNIVERSE.
PERFECTION. THE PATH
TO PERFECTION EXISTS
IN YOUR KIND.
WE SEE IT.

WHY
FIGHT THIS?
WHY CHOOSE
WEAKNESS?

MUST
UNDERSTAND.
BEFORE YOUR
ELIMINATION.



OH SHUT
THE @#%
UP.

I DON'T CARE
THAT WE'RE NOT
PERFECT. NEITHER
WERE YOUR CREATORS,
YOU IDIOT MACHINE,
THEY KILLED
THEMSELVES OFF
MILLENNIA AGO.

YOU COULD PULL
PEOPLE FROM EARTH
FOR ANOTHER MILLION
YEARS, AND EVERY TIME
WE'RE GOING TO FAIL
THIS IDIOTIC TEST. HELL,
IF THERE ARE OTHER
WORLDS YOU WANT TO
TRY OUT, I BET YOU'D
FIND THE SAME.



I DON'T THINK
PERFECTION
IS POSSIBLE.



DO NOT...
ACCEPT
THIS.

TOO
BAD.


BECAUSE I
JUST FOUND THE
CONTROL FOR THE
TRANSPORTATION
PLANE.

WILL NOT...
ALLOW THIS...
EXPERIMENT
MUST
CONTINUE...

YOU ARE
NOT...STRONG
ENOUGH TO
FIGHT US.



ALONE,
PERHAPS.



BUT YOU MADE A MISTAKE. YOU LET TWO OF HER FRIENDS IMPRINT THEIR MINDS ON YOUR ENTIRE COMPUTER NETWORK.

THAT WAS PRETTY DUMB OF YOU.



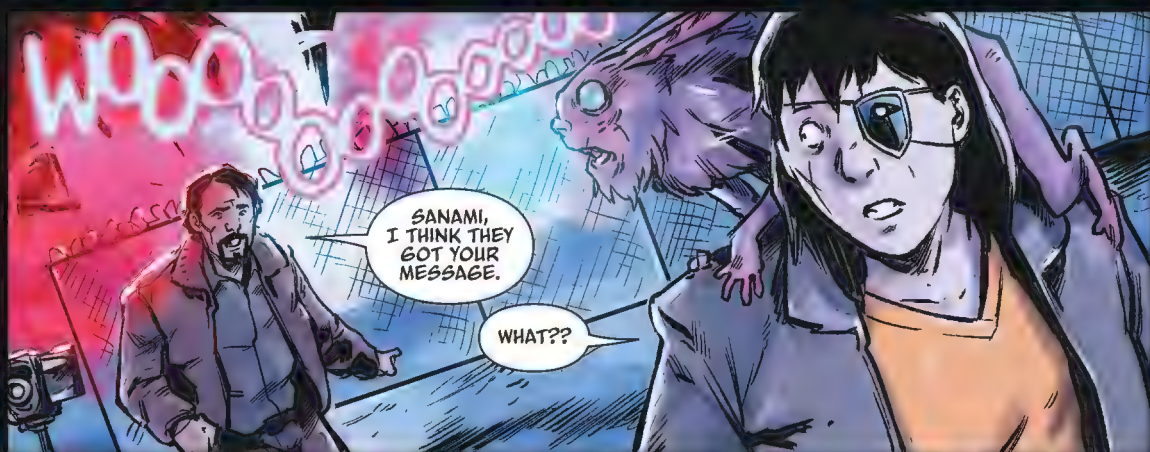
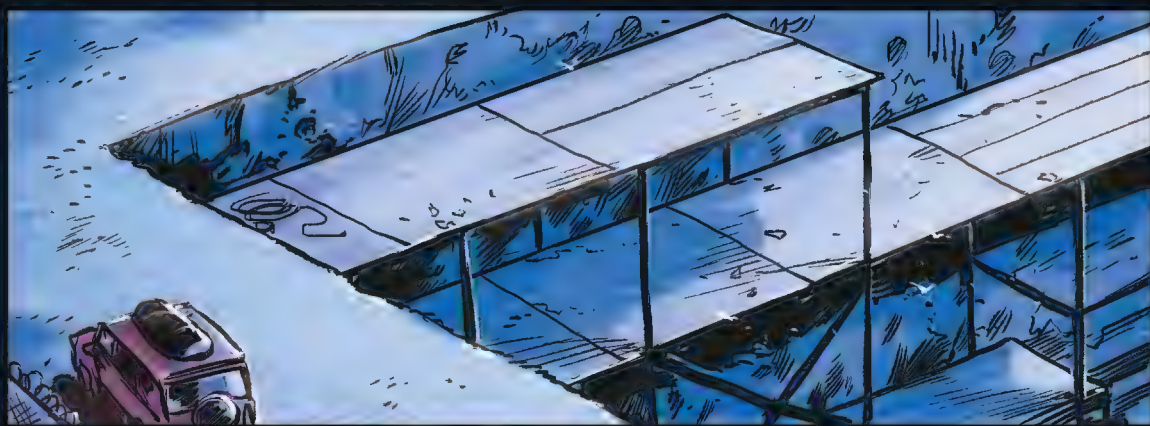
IMPOSSIBLE...

I'VE BEEN REWRITING YOUR BASE CODING FOR WEEKS. YOU'RE NOT IN CONTROL OF THIS SYSTEM ANYMORE.



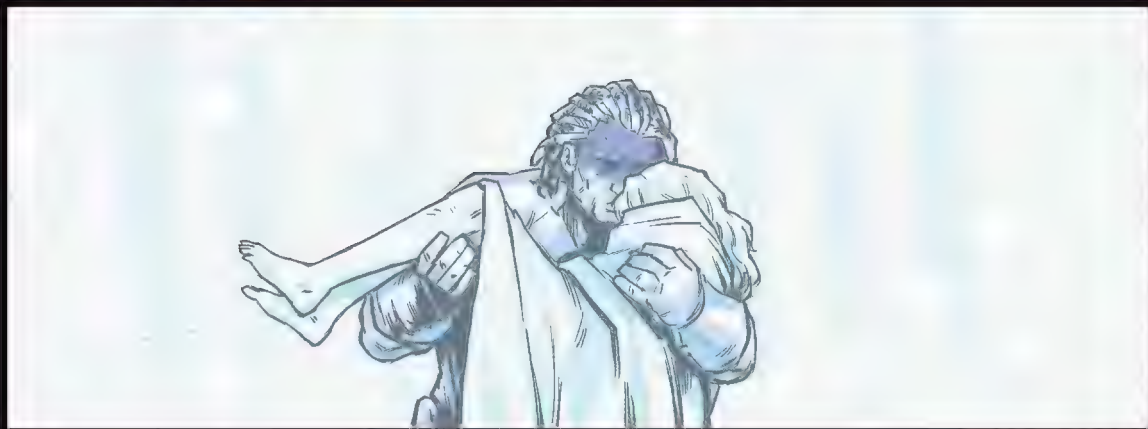
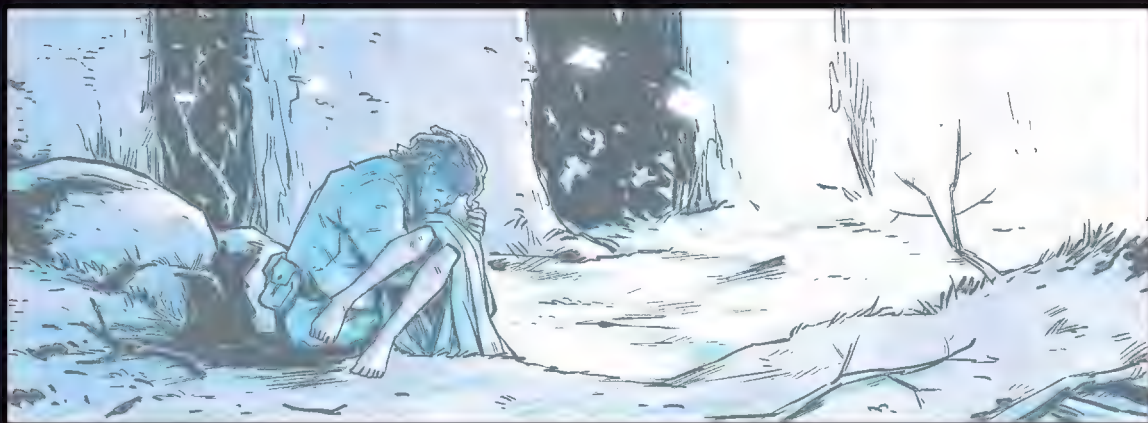
WE ARE.









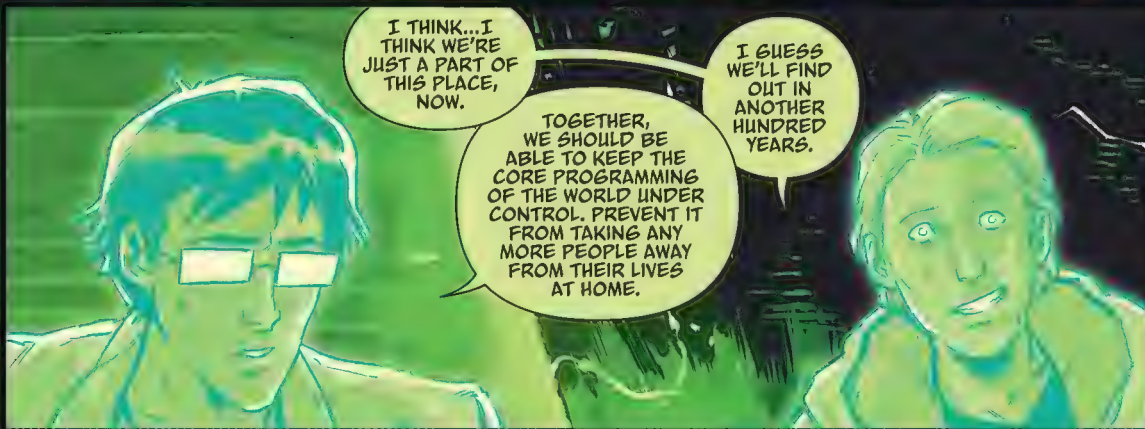




I THOUGHT...
I THOUGHT I WAS
GOING TO DIE. I
THOUGHT THIS WAS
THE END.

IT'S AN
END. IT'S TIME
FOR YOU TO
GO HOME,
KAREN.

WHAT
ABOUT THE
TWO OF
YOU?



I THINK...I
THINK WE'RE
JUST A PART OF
THIS PLACE,
NOW.

TOGETHER,
WE SHOULD BE
ABLE TO KEEP THE
CORE PROGRAMMING
OF THE WORLD UNDER
CONTROL. PREVENT IT
FROM TAKING ANY
MORE PEOPLE AWAY
FROM THEIR LIVES
AT HOME.

I GUESS
WE'LL FIND
OUT IN
ANOTHER
HUNDRED
YEARS.



I ALWAYS
WANTED TO BE AN
EXCEPTIONAL MAN. I
THINK BECOMING AN
IMMORTAL ALIEN
SUPERCOMPUTER IS
GOING TO HAVE TO
DO THE TRICK.



I'LL...I'LL
MAKE SURE
PEOPLE
KNOW WHAT
YOU DID.



THAT
DOESN'T
MATTER
ANYMORE.

ALL THAT
MATTERS IS YOU
GET TO LIVE THE
REST OF YOUR
LIFE.



WHAT'S IT
DOING...?

THE PLANE
IS CLOSING.
IT'S TIME.

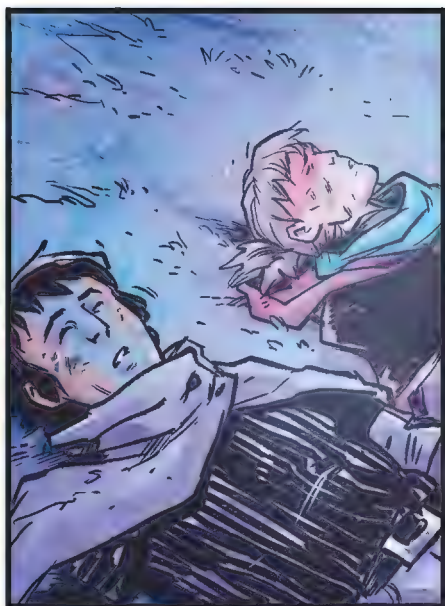


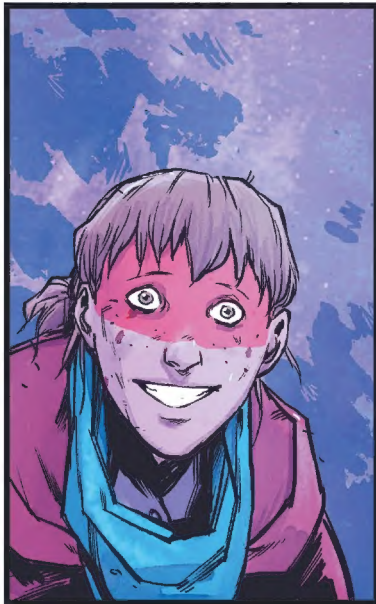
WAIT!
I'M NOT
READY...

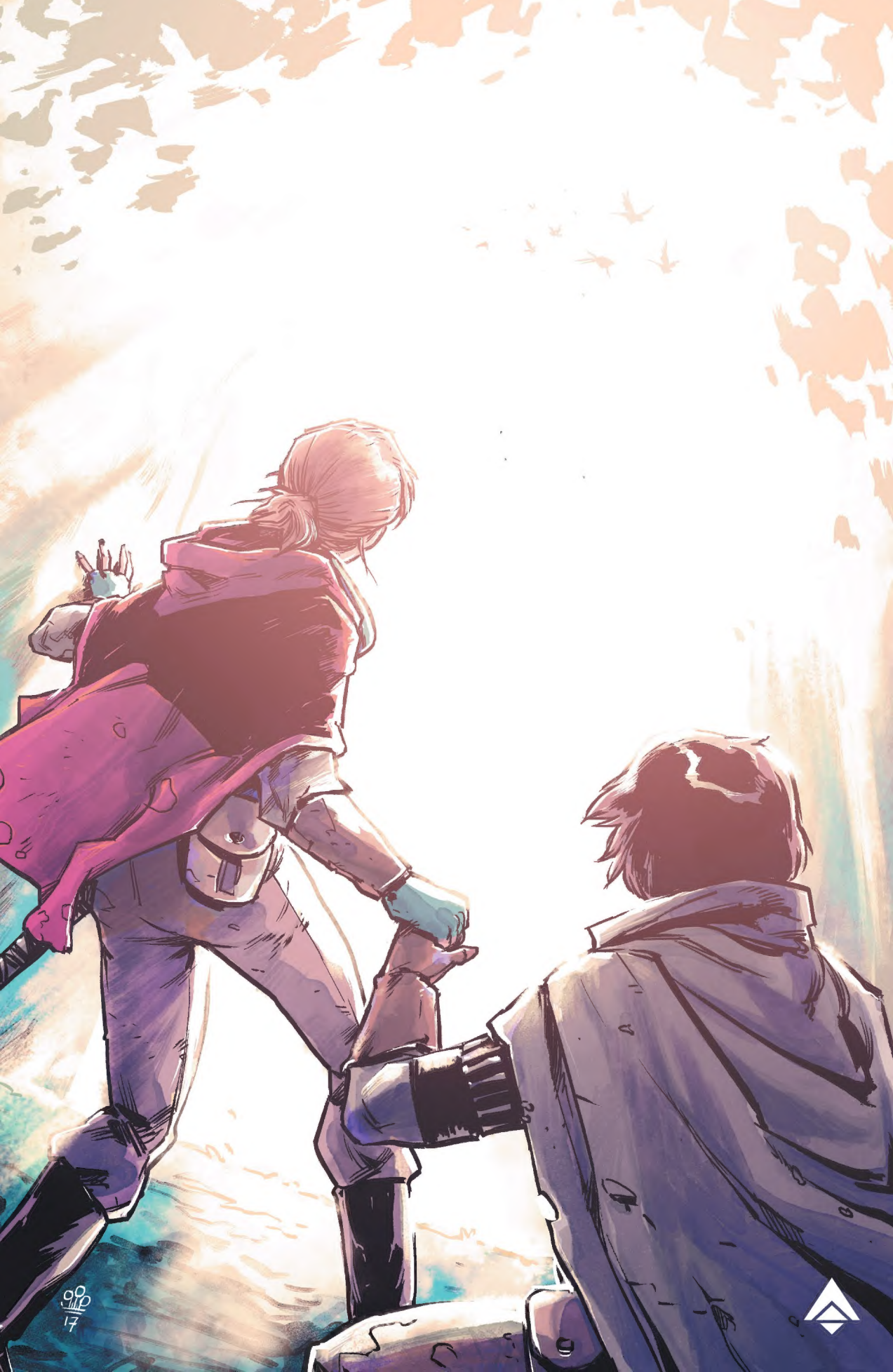
YES, YOU
ARE.



GOODBYE,
KAREN.







GET TO KNOW **BOOM! STUDIOS**

ARUNE SINGH

VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING



Currently Reading: *How We Did It: The Subban Plan for Success in Hockey, School and Life* by Karl Subban

Favorite Item on Desk: The hockey puck from the first Montreal Canadiens game that my wife Michelle & I saw together in Montreal.

Food I'd Wrestle a Bear For: Schwartz's Smoked Meat. I rarely eat meat, but these sandwiches from the iconic Montreal restaurant are undeniable.

If I Won the Lottery I'd Spend the Money On: Buying the Montreal Canadiens after I followed John Mayer on tour for a year on a brand new Harley Davidson Street 750.

Hometown: The 6ix AKA T-Dot AKA Toronto, Ontario, Canada

WE'RE OUT OF **THE** **WOODS**™

On my hard drive, there's a file named *The Woods*, created on June 10, 2012. There are only a few lines of text in it, but this is how it starts. "Full midwestern high school is beamed to planet on the other end of the universe. Wooded planet. Lotsa problems and stuff." It's followed by a few brief, generic descriptors that would ultimately become the core cast of *The Woods*: Adrian, Karen, Isaac, Ben, Sanami, and Calder.

It would be another year and a half before my incredible partner Michael Dialynas would bring those characters to life in a few sketches that immediately captured the heart of the series. And a bit longer before the first issue hit the stands. Back then, I only had a few comic credits to my name. I was still working at a small advertising firm in New York City, moonlighting on a few small co-written projects for big publishers, unsure what my next steps would be. I still remember, late one night, pacing in my Manhattan apartment on the phone with my friend and mentor, Scott Snyder, when he asked me the most important question of my young career. "If you could only write one comic book for the rest of your life, what would that comic book be?" The answer wasn't meant to be my favorite superhero, but rather, what kind of series would encapsulate all my interests, all the core themes I wanted to play with, all the settings and genres I wanted to explore...

The question set my brain on fire. But a few months later, one afternoon, I opened a document and started to write a rough sentence about a high school transported into an alien forest, and the kids trying to figure out how



Issues #33-35 Connecting Covers
Michael Dialynas

to survive and how to get home. Ultimately, *The Woods* is a story about growing up (aren't all stories about teenagers?), but more specifically, it's the story of my life, the encapsulation of the first five years of my career, and all my interests and follies. It ends with an understanding that the process of growing up never really ends, it just changes.

By putting the last words of this series to the page earlier today, one part of my life is over. I'm out of the Woods. But that just means the next part of my life is ready to begin. And it means that it's time for me to ask myself the question all over again, and see what strange sentence might fall out and shape the next era of my life. Until then, my love goes to my co-creator, Michael, and my incredible editors, Eric Harburn and Jasmine Amiri. And to each and every one of you who came to the other end of the universe to see some "problems and stuff" unfold.

James Tynion IV
2017, NYC

Every hundred years, the Black City has selected a remote population from Earth and transported them to the woods. These civilizations have not always lived in harmony...but now, they must either fight in unison to turn their weapons against the technology that brought them here in the first place, or meet total elimination in the face of Isaac's unworldly power. Will this unification of factions be enough or are they all doomed?

Written by **James Tynion IV** (*Detective Comics*, *Memetic*) and illustrated by **Michael Dialynas** (*Gotham Academy*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), **"The Final War"** collects the critically acclaimed eighth arc of the best-selling series.

THIS IS IT, THE FINAL CHAPTERS
AFTER 3 YEARS WE ARE FINALLY OUT OF THE WOODS
I CANT WAIT

J. EDWARDS (BOOM STUDIOS)

